

a locket of self desire

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by [lightning_anon](#)

Summary

Tommy has fucked up. Look he knows he has. He pushed people away, took his brother's meds, and caused his other brother to have a meltdown. He's done some bad things. But that's in the past and he's doing better. He's made his amends and worked on his self worth. Just because he's fucked up in the past doesn't mean he is a fuck up. He understands that. Now, over a year down the line, things... things are good.

Of course, that changes with the appearance of a new foster kid. Who is this Ranboo guy anyway?

-

Or: the obligatory sbi foster au sequel, but with a focus on healing as a long term process.

here we go again

Chapter Notes

CW: brief fear/panic, general shittiness of the foster issues, mentions of abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy and Phil have just sat down for dinner when Phil gets the call. Tommy can tell by Phil's furrowed brow and small huffs that it's something serious.

"I want to," Phil says, "but- I can't. I have Tommy."

Tommy looks up at the sound of his name. The mention has him trembling slightly, the context making him worried that he somehow fucked something up.

But Phil gives him a small smile and he slowly relaxes. He can trust Phil.

"Okay. Okay, give me an hour? I need to talk to him. It's not- this isn't a yes. If you have another- no no I get it I do- just-"

Phil gives silent again and eventually sighs.

"Okay, thank you," Phil says, "I'll call back soon."

With those final words, he hangs up and looks across at Tommy.

"What was that?" Tommy asks immediately.

Phil hesitates.

"That was Amelia."

Tommy goes still at the name of his old social worker. A string of fear that he thinks will always be there tenses inside of him, pulling taunt. It leaves him exposed.

"You- you're- are you-"

"Tommy it wasn't about you," Phil reassures, "you're here to stay, okay."

The words have Tommy relaxing easily and he lets out a chuckle.

"Right," he says, "how could you ever get rid of a big man like me?"

Phil gives him a smile.

"A boy- your age- needs an emergency placement. I don't usually... well. He needs a place Tommy."

"Oh."

"But," Phil says, "I'm not saying yes until we have a chance to talk."

Tommy frowns.

"What's there to talk about?" he asks, "kid needs a place to stay, we got room," he insists.

It's kinda an easy solution if he thinks about it.

"Tommy, if he stays here, I'm hoping it will be a permanent placement just like for you and your brothers. That's a big change, and a lot to think about."

Oh. Right. Tommy hadn't really thought that far ahead. He stares at the table, leg bouncing as he considers.

The house has been quiet since both Techno and Wil moved out, even if Wil visits most weekends. Part of Tommy enjoys being an only child. He has the house to himself and Phil is all his. It's maybe a little selfish, but Tommy's never really had a parent who cared about him before, and sometimes it's nice to be the sole center of attention.

It does mean that Phil refuses to put up with his bullshit though. And less people means he has to do more chores. But less people also means less mess so the chores don't take as long.

But this kid, this kid needs a home. A place to stay. Tommys been there.

"What's his name?" Tommy asks.

"Ranboo," Phil says softly.

Tommy looks at him for a second.

"Well that's a shit name," he declares, "I say no, unless he's willing to change it to something cooler."

"Tommy!" Phil scolds.

"Joking, joking," Tommy replies, throwing his hands in the air to prove his innocence, "but yeah," he says, "I mean why not? House is quiet anyways."

"Tommy this isn't a light decision. It's- I don't want you to do this impulsively."

"Phil have you met me," Tommy deadpans, "ninety percent of my decisions are impulsive."

"You say that like it's a good thing."

"It is!" Tommy insists.

Phil chuckles.

In those brief seconds, Tommy takes a minute to think more about the quick decision he came to. What would it be like to have another entire person in the house? Would Tommy be okay with that?

"I'm serious though. It's- I get it okay. And like- he needs a place, and this is kinda the best place you can end up so..." Tommy shrugs, "don't know how I could say he shouldn't get that chance, y'know?"

Tommy, well he genuinely doesn't know what he would've done without ending up at Phil's. Probably float around, eventually get stuck in a group home when people stopped taking him until he inevitably aged out. Minimum wage job if he's lucky, barely scraping by working with the few supports the system provides after you age out to try and get a roof over his head. Tommy knows it wouldn't be pretty.

And this new kid- he's Tommys age. He doesn't have much time left until he's alone. There's nothing worse than being alone.

"Tommy, you are an extraordinarily selfless child," Phil says.

Tommy scowls at the compliment.

"I'm just saying yes so he can do some of my chores. I'm fucking tried of it man. Vacuuming sucks."

Phil gives him a short eyeroll, and that's that.

Well really, it's not. Phil insists that Tommy takes the entire hour to think about it, and he does. They eat dinner together, chatting and joking and then work as a team doing dishes. As they finish up, the timer goes off, and Phil looks at Tommy for a final response.

Tommy nods.

Phil grins broadly and picks back up his phone.

Tommy darts off when he realizes that the conversation is going to be a lot longer and way more boring than he expected. He disappears up to his room and starts to consider.

Ranboo was his name. And Phil said he would be his age.

He pulls out his DS, still the same battered one he brought with him to this house all that time ago. No matter how old and beat up it is, it holds a special place in his heart. Phil's offered to get him a new one, and the family does have a switch that is mostly Tommys, but there's something about his 2DS that has him hanging on to it. He worked hard to keep it all those years, to keep it away from people who would steal it or try and break it. Tommys not about to get rid of it. He turns it on and quickly gets lost in the world of Animal Crossing.

His gameplay is eventually interrupted by a soft knock on his door.

"Come in," Tommy calls as he saves his game.

Phil pushes the door open and enters the room. He walks over to where Tommy is splayed on his belly across his bed, and sits down on the mattress next to him.

"Ranboo is going to be here in thirty minutes," Phil tells him.

"Oh shit, that's soon," Tommy says.

"It's a quick flip," Phil agrees, "he had to be pulled from his last place."

Tommy tenses.

"His fault or there's?" he asks.

"What?" Phil asks.

"He got pulled," Tommy insists, "so was it his fault, or the fosters?"

Phil sighs.

"Foster family's," he admits, "that's all I'm telling you, it's his to share."

Tommy nods. He's been pulled twice because of families before. It's- well if Ranboo's being pulled this fast without any pre-planned placement, it isn't good.

Tommy wonders what happened. Abuse is the top contender for a quick pull like that. And knowing Phil's history with fucked-up kids and how Amelia went straight to him- well Tommy has his suspicions.

"Will you help me move a few things out of the office?" Phil asks.

"What?" Tommy frowns. He flips over onto his back and then pulls himself into a seated position to face Phil, "why?"

"I'm thinking that's going to be Ranboo's room," Phil explains.

"But it's your office?" Tommy pushes.

The house isn't small, and two of the bedrooms don't have people living in them. Why is Phil putting Ranboo in the office?

"I'm not making you share a room. This is already much quicker than I would have liked, and I know you appreciate your space. Wilbur and Techno's... I want them both to have places to come back to if they want to, y'know? I can't- I don't want to put Ranboo in either of their old rooms until talking to them."a

Tommy's a bit surprised but earned by the answer. It's- to see Phil not immediately fill up Wil and Techno's rooms fills him with a teenage warmth that he can't exactly identify. It's not like Wilbur and Techno love here anymore but...

But Ranboo taking one of their rooms, or if he took Tommy's almost feels like being replaced. Logically, Tommy knows that's not true, but he can't help but feel that way a little bit. He imagines Wilbur and Techno would feel the same way.

It's one of those trauma things that you get from bouncing around in the system. Once you've been abandoned, it never really goes away. Tommy knows how he still gets protective of his things and space. He's seen Techno and Wil be the same way.

Tommy knows to never touch Wil's guitar without permission. Phil doled out the extra cash to get Techno his own room in college. (Tommy remembers Techno trying to say he'd be fine, but Phil had insisted and they only had a small argument about the money before Techbno caved).

"So... willing to help me out?" Phil asks.

Tommy quickly nods and leaps to his feet.

"Let's go old man," Tommy agrees.

Together they leave Tommy's room, heading down the stairs and to Phil's office. They start by moving Phil's things out of drawers and cabinets and get his monitor upstairs. After that it's a shorter set up of rearranging some of the furniture, and moving one of the desks out.

A nice thing is that the office also doubles as a guest room, so it has a bed already in it, made neatly.

"I feel like we're missing something," Phil says when the room is done, peering around it and carefully inspecting every inch.

Tommy snorts.

"Didn't think anything could shake you up old man," Tommy says, "it's fine, we can fix whatever when we realize."

"Yeah," Phil agrees with a sigh, and Tommy realizes how out of place this behavior is for him. He's not used to being the one to reassure Phil. Usually Phil does that to him. "It's weird not having time to prepare. Last that happened was with Techno."

*Wait, you didn't plan for Techno?"

Phil looks over at him.

"No?" Phil says, "did you not know that?"

Tommy shakes his head.

Phil laughs.

"Oh yeah. It was pretty much the same situation. I had just recently gotten approved and was slowly figuring out how the system worked and stuff, and then suddenly I was getting a call

asking if I had space for an emergency placement. A few hours later and there was Techno."

"What a nerd," Tommy teases.

"Mm. Yeah this was when my kids were actually shorter than me."

"Hey you might get lucky with Ranboo," Tommy insists. With perfect timing, there was a knock on the door.

Tommy freezes.

Phil immediately looks at him, obviously noticing how tense he is.

"You can stay for introductions if you want," Phil says, "or you can head up to your room, do whatever."

"I, um..." Tommy falters, "do you have to talk to Amelia?"

"Yeah," Phil agrees.

"Okay, well maybe I can... show him around then?" Tommy offers. "Like Wil and Tech did for me."

Phil smiles.

"Sounds like a plan," he agrees. He gently places a hand on Tommy's shoulder, giving it a light squeeze. Tommy leans into it.

Tommy nods, and follows slowly as Phil approaches the front door and welcomes them inside. Tommy grabs a tangle from his pocket to fiddle with as they enter.

Amelia goes first, followed by a hunched, lanky, extremely fucking tall teenager.

"Holt shit," Tommy blurts out, "how tall are you? Are you taller than Wil?"

The kid- Ranboo- looks up, and he's still slouched but he's now closer to his full height and oh god is he tall.

"Uh..." the boy said with wide eyes, "me?"

"Yeah you," Tommy says, "who do you think I'm asking? The door?"

"Oh uh, I'm 6'6"."

"Damn," Tommy says, "that is tall."

"Tommy," Phil cuts in, "do you want to give Ranboo a tour?"

"Sure, follow me big man."

Ranboo hunches awkwardly at the words and quickly stumbles forward to Tommy's side, looking back at Amelia and Phil with large eyes. Tommy doesn't know if he's looking for permission or pleading for them to save him. Tommy twists the tangle tight around some of his fingers.

"Okay!" Tommy says, and Ranboo jumps, "tour time..we can start with uh..."

It's then that Tommy realizes he has no actual plans for this tour, having gone with the idea impulsively. Fucking ADHD.

Tommy thinks back to his own tour.

"We can start with your room," Tommy decides. "Give you some space to drop off your trash bag."

At the mention of his trash bag, Ranboo awkwardly shifts. It's then Tommy realizes he doesn't hold anything in his hands.

"Oh damn, you got nothin?" he asks.

"No, uh, I forgot it in the car," Ranboo admits. Tommy gives him a blank stare. Possessions are few and far between when you're in foster care and he's never heard of someone forgetting about their trash bag before. But whatever.

"Alright," Tommy says, "let's get it then."

Ranboo shifts on his feet again.

"The car's locked, I think," he says.

"Well no duh, ask Amelia to open it."

"I..." Ranboo hesitates a moment. He slowly meets Tommy's eyes, "okay."

Tommy nods and waits. When Ranboo doesn't take a step back in the direction they came from, Tommy skirts around him and leads the way back himself.

Ranboo shuffles after him.

Amelia is quick to help them, trusting the two with her keys as they grab the trash bag themselves before quickly returning.

"Alright," Tommy says, "let's head to your room."

He leads Ranboo down the hall, pointing out doors as he goes.

"That's Techno's room, but he's in California for college. And that's the bathroom. Here's your room. It used to be Phil's office."

Tommy shoulders the last door open and let's Ranboo enter slowly. The boy moves to the middle of the room and stands there, blinking back at Tommy, looking like a kicked puppy.

God this kid is fucking weird.

"You can put down your stuff here," Tommy says, still standing at the door.

Ranboo gently puts his trash bag on the floor and looks back to Tommy.

"Okay," Tommy says, "uh... rest of the house then?"

Ranboo continues to look at him and gives the smallest of nods. Tommy pulls at one end of his tangle.

Tommy retreats and slowly starts to show Ranboo around the rest of the house, eventually getting to the second floor and pointing out his own room.

Ranboo follows along, reminding Tommy of a shadow. He's mostly silent, only giving the smallest of acknowledgement to the things Tommy is saying.

Tommy wonders if he was like this when he first came to Phil's house. He remembers being unsure, and thrown off, but he's almost certain that he was louder.

"Oh and house rule, ask before entering people's rooms. Phil won't go into your room without asking."

Ranboo blinks at him, and gives another small nod.

"Right," Tommy says, leading Ranboo back downstairs, "that's the tour."

He brings Ranboo back to Phil and Amelia, who are still talking.

Amelia's pointing out a few things on a paper and gesturing at a box as Phil nods and asks questions.

Tommy doesn't care enough to question, instead entering the room and quickly sitting by Phil and staring right at him.

"Yes Tommy?" Phil asks, throwing a hand on top of his hair. Tommy huffs at it and stares intently at his tangle as he wraps it in a circle.

"Tour's done," Tommy says.

"Yeah? That was fast."

"Maybe your slow old man," Tommy challenges. Phil gives him a small smile and a soft shake of his head.

"Ranboo, Amelia, and I need to talk for a minute," Phil tells him, "mind scattering for a minute?"

Tommy raises an eyebrow.

"Sure," he says, ditching his chair. He gives a nod to Ranboo who is still hovering in the entrance to the kitchen, out of place..

Tommy brushes past him, headed up to his own room.

When he gets there, he jumps into his bed, pulling out his phone and tapping on a familiar contact.

Tommy: *hey*

Tommy: *guess who has a new brother*

Tubbo: ?

Tommy: *phils fostering another kid*

Tubbo: *oh really?*

Tommy: *ye his names ranboo and he's fucking 6'6"*

Tubbo: *hes already their? y didn't u tell me :(*

Tommy: *didnt know until an hour ago*

Tubbo: *phil didn't tell u??*

Tommy: *nah emergency placement neither of us knew until literally an hour ago*

Tubbo: *oh*

Tubbo: *well thouhgts?*

Tommy: *idk*

Tommy: *he's quiet*

Tommy: *and tall*

Tubbo: *ur just ubset that another one of ur brothers is taller than u*

Tommy: *fuck u*

Tommy: *im 6'3"*

Tommy: *that's fucking tall*

Tommy: *wilburs just a fucking giant*

Tommy: *and now ranboos even taller*

Tommy: *this isn't fair*

Tommy: *I'm Big Man*

Tubbo: *rambos like a foot taller than me*

Tommy: *ha*

Tommy: *short.*

Tubbo: yes :D

Tommy: its much harder to make fun of u when u don't care

Tubbo: :D

Tommy: u free? want to hang?

Tubbo: yes! meet midway?

Tommy: ye grabbing my bag be there soon

Tubbo: okay!

Tommy hops off his bed, shoving in a pair of shoes and checking that his phone has a decent charge, before clunking down the stairs.

"Phil, I'm meeting up with Tubbo," he calls out toward the kitchen as he heads for the front door.

"Okay," Phil calls back, "are you taking your bike?"

"Yup," Tommy says, trying to exit as quickly as possible, knowing exactly what Phil's next comment will be.

"Helmet Tommy."

"Phil," he whines.

"Helmet."

"Fine," he sighs. He leaves the house, making sure the door closes behind him, and heads to the garage, grabbing his bike from it. Reluctantly, he also grabs his helmet, strapping the annoying thing on top of his head.

He jumps on his bike and begins to make his way to Tubbo's house. He can drive now, sorta. He has his permit but he's still not able to drive by himself for a while yet and neither can Tubbo.

Tubbo's closer than he is though. Tommy, on the other hand, just got his permit.

It's a good thing that Tubbo doesn't live too far away. It's a bit far to walk the entire way, but easy enough to walk and meet midway, or bike for a quicker commute. Plus, their area has decent public transportation which after a few years of living with Phil, Tommy thinks he's finally understanding it.

As he approaches the park they usually meet up at, Tommy starts searching for Tubbo. Not spotting him yet, he stops at the bike rack and drops his bike in it.

He also takes off his helmet, buckling it to his bike and scowling as he tries to fix his hair.

"Nice hair," Tubbo calls, and Tommy turns around to see him biking up to his side. Tubbo stops next to him and gets off his bike before taking off his own helmet. His hair is also messy, flying in numerous directions.

"You're one to talk," Tommy snarks.

Tubbo sticks out his tongue at him, and begins to fix his own hair.

"So, new kid, huh?"

"Yeah," Tommy agrees, "he's fucking giant."

"So I've heard," Tubbo replies.

"No, Tubbo you don't get it! He's taller than Wil. He has four inches on me. Four inches! He's like a foot taller than you Tubbo."

"Hey! I know I'm short but I'm not that short," Tubbo pouts.

"I'm not even kidding," Tommy insists, still trying to take in the ridiculous height of the new addition to his household. Ranboos 6'6", Tubbo's only... "how tall are you Tubbo?" Tommy asks, realizing he doesn't actually know.

Tubbo shrugs.

"I dunno," he says, "I'm not super obsessed with my height."

"Tubbo height and girls are the two most important things in life. And likes."

"What about best friends," Tubbo pouts. Tommy softens.

"After best friends," he reluctantly mumbles.

Tubbo cheers and drags him towards the lake to see if they can spot any turtles.

They spend their time together, making loops around the lake because Tommy can't sit still and pointing out every time a turtle breaches the surface of the lake because Tubbo's obsessed with them. He enjoys telling Tommy that they're jaws have enough strength to easily take off both his fingers and his dick. It's not a great image.

"How are you doing?" Tubbo eventually asks.

Tommy chuckles.

"What do you mean?"

Tubbo shrugs, "Like are you actually okay with all this?"

"Yeah," Tommy agrees immediately, "Kid needs a place, y'know?"

"Okay. Just know you can talk to me, y'know? I'm here for you."

Tommy is so grateful for Tubbo. Tubbo has always been at his side through thick and thin and there for him every step of the way. Tommy was certain Tubbo would have ditched him by now, but he hasn't and recently Tommy's begun to genuinely believe that Tubbo won't leave him.

It's hard relearning that people do genuinely care about him and enjoy spending time with him after so many years of being told otherwise, but he's made so much progress and is proud to say that he trusts Tubbo. Tubbo would never just leave.

"Oh I found some old pictures of me from my trampolining days. Specifically the pictures of when I shattered my arm. Do you wanna see them?"

Tommy immediately bursts into laughter, doubling over as he catches his breath. He looks back at Tubbo who's grinning widely, eyes twinkling, close to laughing himself. Tommy slowly straightens himself back up.

"Go on then," he insists, and Tubbo starts dramatically setting the scene as he pulls up the photos.

Chapter End Notes

so happy to be back. hope y'all enjoy the ride. like the last fic, this is all prewritten and should update a little more frequently than weekly.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

again and again

Chapter Summary

Tommy tries to get to know Ranboo, reaching out and starting a friendship. It... doesn't exactly go as well as he hoped. What is he doing wrong?

Chapter Notes

CW: references to past abuse, past severe allergic reaction, rejection sensitive dysphoria, feelings of failure/inadequacy, memory issues

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Morning Ranboo," Phil greets with a smile. Tommy turns to find the newest member of their household awkwardly shuffling into the kitchen from the hall. He slouches, carefully raising a hand to give a slight wave. An odd sense of déjà vu washes over Tommy.

"Want to join us? We're about to have breakfast," Phil says as he finishes the eggs.

"Uh, okay," Ranboo agrees. He fully enters the kitchen and joins Tommy at the table, sitting across from him. He's currently playing with an infinity cube, stimming contently as he watches Phil cook.

"I'm Phil," Phil says, "that's Tommy. If you have any questions about anything let me know. You also have your journal."

Ranboo gives a stiff nod and Tommy stares at him, before looking back over at Phil. What was that for? He catches Phil's gaze, raising an eyebrow. Phil gently shakes his head. With a sigh, Tommy leans back against his chair but drops the weird interaction.

He lets his leg bounce absentmindedly, getting lost in a variety of thoughts, mind jumping from one to another. Did he finish his level on his game last night? He can't remember if he got past the final boss. The infinity cube makes a satisfying click in his hands.

"So... you're Tommy?"

Tommy looks up, gaze meeting Ranboo's for a second. Ranboo freezes and holds eye contact instantly, to the point where Tommy feels uncomfortable by it, and he pulls away. The minute he does, Ranboo looks away as well. Phil sets a glass of milk next to the new kid and gives Tommy a look.

"Uh, yeah," he says.

Ranboo nods and Phil gives him another look as he takes his own seat.

Fuck is Tommy really being expected to socialize.

"So-" Tommy begins, "what happened at your last placement?"

Fuck Timmy didn't mean to say that.

Ranboo freezes.

Tommy really hadn't meant to ask that. He gets that things were a shit show sometimes. He just- well he hadn't thought it through and it had been burning in his mind since Phil first told him and he hadn't meant to.

He wanted to know, sure. But he hadn't wanted to actually ask.

"You don't have to-" Tommy scrambles to explain.

"They were ruled neglectful and abusive," Ranboo says.

"Oh shit man," Tommy hisses. "They hit you?"

Ranboo looks at him without meeting his eyes, shifting in his seat.

"No- I uh, I'm allergic to water? And they kinda intentionally didn't react when I was having a severe allergic reaction. Which they were sort of responsible for in the first place."

Tommy stares at the kid.

"You're allergic to water."

"Yeah. I uh, I know it sounds weird. But it's a real thing, I promise."

Tommy looks at the kid for a minute longer, completely taken aback as he considers Ranboo's words.

Seconds later he bursts out laughing.

"Big man you have the worst luck ever," Tommy says, "you're allergic to what most of our bodies are made of? That's bullshit."

Ranboo cracks a smile and lets out a small chuckle as he ducks his head.

"Yeah," he admits softly, "it is kinda stupid, huh. It's only when it touches my skin though, so it's not terrible. And I actually have a pretty mild form. I can take showers and drink water without too much trouble."

Tommy stares at him, not even having thought of something as simple as bathing. He flips the infinity cube over.

"Holy shit, bug man, what do you do when it rains."

"Break out into hives and suffer," Ranboo admits. And it isn't funny- it shouldn't be, because Ranboo has an allergy to something that covers the majority of the earth's surface, but it really is fucking hilarious. The two of them let out twin giggles.

Phil rolls his eyes at them, but he has a smile on his own face. He gets like that, all sappy and happy when his kids get along. It's stupid, but something about it always makes Tommy glow with pride.

"How's Tubbo?" Phil eventually asks when their laughter dies down.

"Good," Tommy says, "His usual bee-ish self. He wants to meet Ranboo. Invited himself over for dinner and everything the minute he gets the go ahead."

Phil smiles at the comment.

"I'll let you know," Phil replies.

"Uh, who's Tubbo?" Ranboo asks.

"Who's Big T?" Tommy mocks, pulling out full dramatics, "What do you mean who's Tubbo? Tubbo like da bee! Tubbo is-"

"Tubbo is Tommy's best friend," Phil explains, butting in to the amazing reenactment Tommy had started.

"Phil," Tommy whines, "you ruined my moment."

"If you want to be dramatic, sign up for theater."

"But Dad, I don't want to get bullied."

"Tommy I really doubt joining theater will change your chances of being bullied much in your case."

Tommy frowns at him and Phil raises his eyebrows, willing to challenge Tommy right back. One of the hinges in his infinity cube squeaks softly.

With a sigh, Tommy lets it go. He pulls his attention back to Ranboo who has some sort of journal out as he scribbles something down.

"What's that?" Tommy says, inching closer to catch sight of what Ranboo's writing.

Immediately Ranboo's eyes go wide and he pulls the book close, bunching his body around it so he puts himself between it and Tommy.

Tommy very slowly pulls back, not expecting such a dramatic reaction, and carefully tries to reduce the attention on the object.

Slowly, Ranboo loosens his tight grip on the book, still holding it stiffly, but not as bad as before.

He spares a glance to Tommy, some sort of mental reassurance that the other won't reach out to snatch. His body relaxes and he turns back to his book.

"It's my memory book," he explains, "I have a pretty awful memory, so I write stuff down to read when I forget it."

"You have memory issues and are allergic to water?" Tommy asks, deadpan, "Jesus where does Phil keep finding kids like us?"

Tommy expects another chuckle. Ranboo's been pretty easy going so far, playing into the jokes and the lighthearted teasing Tommy had set up.

But something about Tommy's comment falls flat, with Ranboo saying nothing and laughing even less. He hangs his head instead, giving a small shrug, and looks at his book.

Tommy clears his throat to fill the awkward silence.

He didn't mean to make Ranboo feel bad, he was really trying to bond. Ranboo seemed like a good guy and Tommy want to help him feel welcome. God why'd he have to fuck it up? He always does stuff like this.

They sit in awkwards silence for the rest of the meal.

Luckily for Tommy, his phone buzzes with a text not long later, and he uses it as an excuse to bus his dishes and leave the scenario.

He escapes to his room and pulls his phone at, grinning at the sight of a familiar group chat.

Sleepy Bois

Wilby: heard there's a new kid on the block

Techno: philza: sees orphan

Techno: also philza: mine now

Wilby: tech ur one t talk u got a fucking shelter dog

Techno: floof does not deserve this slander

Tommy: both of you are idiots

Wilby: Tommy!!!!

Techno: new kid updates?

Tommy: oh I see how it is

Tommy: only care abt my inside knowledge hmmm /j

Tommy: nope no info for you

Wilby: I'll tell dad

Tommy: tell dad and ill tell him what u did to my vlog gun

Tommy: did I use the taggy things correctly??

Techno: lmao Phil would prob laugh

Techno: and yes ty

Tommy: whatever. I def don't care abt u or anything /s

Wilbur: new kid????

Tommy: fine fine fine

Tommy: kids name is ranboo. He's taller than fucking wil and he's allergic to water. Bit of a disaster tbh, got pulled from his last placement.

Wilbur: that's a thing?? U can be allergic to water?? /gen

Tommy: apparently

Techno: y he get pulled?

Tommy: shit place. Not his fault /srs

Techno: good

Techno: we already have u, we don't need another brat /j

Tommy clutches his phone slightly harder at the words.

It's a joke, it's a joke, Techno even tagged it that way. Something about it still stings. He's done so much better over the last few years but sometimes it's still hard to remind himself that he's loved and cared for and not annoying everyone he meets.

Just like he did with Ranboo earlier. Fuck, why did he have to say that?

Techno: sry that was a bit mean

Tommy texts back quickly.

Tommy: ur fine Big Man

Techno: still

They move on from the conversation and Wilbur lets him know that he'll definitely be dropping by this weekend. Tommy continue chatting with his brothers, only pausing when there's a soft knock on the door.

“Tommy?” Phil calls, can I come in.

“Yeah,” he answers absentmindedly, still paying attention to the group chat. He does his best to focus on it, but his mind keeps wandering back to when he fucked up earlier with Ranboo.

Phil opens the door, and enters Tommy’s room, leaving the door open behind him. Tommy looks up as he enters.

“Who you talking to?” Phil asks as he watches Tommy text.

“Wil and Techno. Wil’s coming over this weekend.”

“Tell them I say hi?”

Tommy gives a quick nod and does exactly that, before dropping his phone in his lap and waiting for Phil to explain why he came into his room.

“How are you doing?” he asks.

“Uh... fine? Why?”

Phil sighs, and takes a seat on Tommy’s bed. The action triggers something within Tommy, hardening in his insides. He recognizes Phil’s movements as much more serious. Tommy doesn’t know when or what caused this to switch from casual to serious, but it has him hardening as his heart beats a bit faster.

“Is something wrong?” Tommy asks, trying not to react and give away his fear.

“No,” Phil says, “It was- at breakfast you were a bit quiet. I was worried. I know that Ranboo’s silence could have triggered your RSD.”

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, just one of the many billions of symptoms adhd has Tommy dealing with. Tommy didn’t even know his feelings of intense failure and rejection had a name until a few months ago. Most of the time, Phil is better at recognizing it than he is. This is one of those times.

Tommy reflects on the situation, reflects on how he felt he had fucked up and already ruined his chances of getting along with Ranboo.

“Oh,” Tommy says, “Oh. I think you’re right. It did.”

Phil gives him a small smile and Tommy cringes in on himself.

He thinks about the interaction again, about his attempt at a joke and Ranboo’s silence and how Tommy made another social blunder, hilariously failing and now Ranboo’s never going to like him.

The thoughts are frustrating, making him want to disappear and he shoves his face quickly into his hands, teeth grinding together in his mouth as he tries to forget.

“Can I give you a hug?” Phil’s voice cuts into the violent thoughts.

"Uh, sure?" Tommy says, attempting to relax his body and not overreact.

Phil stands, walking to Tommy's chair and slowly enveloping his youngest.

Tommy sinks into the embrace, hugging him back and breathing in Phil's scent. He thinks about how the smell of Phil has become more and more familiar, and at this point it's a shock to be without it.

On some level, Tommy's a bit frustrated it's become so familiar, because he notices it less now. When he hadn't gotten so familiar with Phil's scent, it was more noticeable, something Tommy could distinctly pin point. Once he got past the self sabotaging bit, it was a nice indication that Phil was there, that he was in the same places as Tommy, the same home, and neither of them would be leaving.

And he got sidetracked again. Okay- Ranboo stuff now.

"I can't stop thinking about it," Tommy admits, "I looked like an idiot."

"No you didn't," Phil immediately counters. "You were trying your best to help Ranboo feel more comfortable in a new and scary environment. That's incredibly thoughtful of you and I'm very proud."

"But I didn't do that," Tommy points out.

Had Phil not noticed Ranboo's obvious silence? What about the way Ranboo had tensed and curled in on himself protectively. Tommy had seen that and knew how much Ranboo hadn't wanted to be there. And Tommy had caused that. Why the hell is Phil proud?

"You didn't know Ranboo would respond that way," Phil tells him, "You did your best with the information you had, and there was a miscommunication between you and Ranboo. It wasn't intentional. Tommy, you're trying your best and I'm proud of that."

Words like that, Phil's encouragement and pride would have been almost impossible to accept just a few months ago. But Tommy's been working hard, making progress and he does his best to validate his experience.

"Thanks," he says, and revisits the conversation once more.

He had been trying to make Ranboo more comfortable, find common ground. He'd missed on that mark, but that wasn't his fault, it just wasn't something Ranboo had positively connected with. That was okay. Tommy had done his best, and now that he had new information, he'd try better, he'd try harder.

That's all he can do.

That's what he would do.

Phil is proud of him.

Tommy is proud of himself.

Carefully, Tommy pulls away. Phil lets him, brushing a hand across his head as he releases him, making Tommy scowl and attempt to fix his curls. Phil gives a small laugh, only making Tommy scowl further.

“You’re a jerk,” Tommy hisses, zero weight behind it.

“Child,” Phil says right back.

There’s a pause of silence, and in that time Tommy has himself once again feeling so grateful for the chance Phil gave him. He doesn’t think he will ever stop being grateful for that, no matter how many times that Phil says he didn’t give a chance to Tommy, but Tommy gave a chance to Phil and to himself.

“I guess I just wanna be good at this,” Tommy admits, “Like a good brother, y’know?”

“I don’t, actually,” Phil admits, “I was an only child.”

Tommy hums.

“I was too,” he admits.

“Yeah?” Phil asks.

Tommy nods. He doesn’t have a lot of memories of his parents, most forgotten with age. He doesn’t know if he can really say he had the only child experience when he only had it for less than he can count on both his hands, but whatever.

“All of us were only children,” Phil points out, “Tech and Wil too.”

“Ranboo?” Tommy asks.

“Ranboo is an only child,” Phil agrees, “Hopefully he won’t have to anymore. If that’s what he wants.”

Tommy could never imagine not wanting Phil, not wanting this.

“Y’know,” Phil comments, “Techno and Wilbur both said pretty much the same things when we started adding to the family. Techno spent a straight week making checklists to confirm everything was perfect for Wil and Wilbur literally made himself sick with worry over you coming, wanting to make sure he did his best.”

“He did?” Tommy asks.

“He did,” Phil says, “Scared the shit out of me.”

Tommy imagines it, a young teen Techno putting together pages of things to get through as well as almost adult Wilbur waking Phil up in the middle of the night, sick with worry of being a good brother. Something about it comforts him.

"It's okay if you feel stressed about it," Phil tells him, "Just talk to me, okay? That's all I ask."

"Yeah, 'course," Tommy agrees, "Big Men talk about their feelings."

Phil chuckles and Tommy smiles at the reaction.

"What do children do then?" he teases.

"Hey!" Tommy protests, "I am very much a Big Man!"

Phil nods but he has one of those looks on his face where Tommy knows he doesn't agree, but is just agreeing to soothe Tommy. It's infuriating. He hates it.

"Fuck you," Tommy scowls.

Phil laughs, and stands up.

"Love you Tommy," he says as he leaves the room.

"Love you too Phil," he agrees, and watches as his father closes the door softly behind him, leaving Tommy with a smile on his face and a bit more confidence.

It doesn't mean he doesn't still feel a bit guilty and ashamed about how he acted in front of Ranboo, but it does have him acknowledging that he's trying his best. That's enough.

With a firm nod, he pushes past the shame. He'll try again some other time.

And he said he tried again, so here he is trying.

The next day, he lightly taps on Ranboo's door, waiting for a response.

Ranboo invites him in, and Tommy pushes the door open, sliding into Ranboo's room.

It's fairly plain, which makes sense considering Ranboo only just got here in addition to the fact that you don't really get to hang onto a lot in the foster system. But Ranboo hasn't even unpacked all the way, trash bag still partially filled at the base of his bed.

Tommy can feel Ranboo looking at him, and then his gaze falling to follow him to the bag.

"You haven't unpacked yet," Tommy notes.

Ranboo shrugs.

"Do you want some help?" Tommy asks. He's doing his best, he's trying. He's trying. He is.

Ranboo shakes his head.

"No thanks," he hesitates, "Uh, thanks though."

Tommy gives an awkward nod. He shuffles on his feet, looking around the bare room.

Why did he come in here again?

He looks back at Ranboo and blinks.

“Uh...” he says. Ranboos stares at him. Tommy can feel himself start to blush. Why did he come in here again? He completely forgot.

“I’m uh, gunna go,” Tommy says.

“Okay,” Ranboo agrees.

Tommy gives him a nod and exits, closing the door on the way back. He heads back down the hall and into the kitchen, then the living room. He gets halfway up the stairs to his room when he remembers why he had gone to Ranboo in the first place.

Right! He was going to ask him if he wanted to do anything.

Tommy turns around, and hops down the stairs, going right back for Ranboo’s room. He knocks in the door once more.

Ranboo invites him in and Tommy reopens the door and steps back into the barren room.

“Wanna do something?” he asks.

Ranboo blinks at him. Tommy blinks back. This is getting awkward now.

“Sure,” Ranboo agrees. He gets up from his bed, grabbing a small backpack by his bedside table and grabbing his journal and pen off the table and putting it into the bag.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Tommy says, “I was just going to show you the garden.” Ranboo doesn’t need to bring his whole backpack.

“Okay,” Ranboo says, still holding the bag.

Tommy shrugs, and let’s it go. He moves to leave the doorway and Ranboo follows behind him. Tommy leads him through the house and out into the back. Tommy’s not exactly a big fan of the outdoors, much preferring to spend time inside and playing games, but he still has to tend to the garden.

Tommy had promised Techno that when he went off for college that he wouldn’t kill the plants Techno had worked hard on maintaining. So far he’s mostly succeeded. Except for the broccoli. They don’t talk about the broccoli. Plus broccoli is gross anyways so it’s kind of good that it died in Tommy’s opinion.

“THis is the garden,” Tommy explains, waving towards the planters that are filled with a decent variety of fruits and vegetables.

Ranboo looks out at it.

Tommy steps forward, moving towards the first planter- the peppers. It doesn't get cold enough here for them to die off in the winter, and now with the spring they're perking up again and really starting to grow.

Ranboo steps forward, crouching next to Tommy at the planter and looking at the peppers.

"These are the peppers," Tommy says.

The two of them stare at them in silence for a moment.

This doesn't seem to be working. Why isn't this working? Why aren't they bonding? Why is Tommy so bad at this?

"I didn't really think you'd be one for gardening," Ranboo admits.

Tommy laughs.

"Fair enough," he says, "I'm not really. The garden's Techno's."

"Who's Techno?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy looks at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Techno?" he asks, "Dude, Techno's the pink hair bitch in all the photos."

"Oh! Oh right, sorry I'm really bad with names."

Tommy laughs.

"Yeah I am too," he agrees.

Ranboo gives him an odd look, and stills for a moment.

"I think uh, it might be a bit different for me," Ranboo mumbles, obviously shy.

Oh right. Memory issues. Kinda ironic Tommy keeps forgetting about that. He doesn't voice that to Ranboo.

"The other's Wil," Tommy reminds, "Wil lives nearby, he's doing his second year of community college right now. He stays for the weekends a lot. Techno's all the way off at university. You probably won't meet him until the summer."

Ranboo shoots him a look.

"That's like- a few months away," he points out.

"Yeah," Tommy agrees, "That's how months work."

Ranboo gives him an odd look.

Tommy switches the subject.

"So yeah, Techno planted these peppers about a year-" but before Tommy can finish his sentence, Ranboo stands and goes over to a different planter, crouching down again and inspecting the plants, back to Tommy. It's an obvious sign of avoidance of Tommy's every seen one. Tommy watches him go.

He doesn't know what he did wrong.

He's trying, he is. Why isn't this working?

Chapter End Notes

settled into my new place which is nice. means i can catch up on comments. ty for everyone who has left one.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

the lead in

Chapter Summary

Tommy goes to therapy, spends the weekend with Wil, and goes back to school. Ranboo follows in his footsteps and gets to meet both Wilbur and Tubbo. Those first meetings go a lot better than Tommy and Ranboo's. Which is fine of course. Totally fine.

Chapter Notes

cw: brief mentions of military/political corruption/politics, feelings of inadequacy, internalized ableism, mentions of ableism, reference to doctor appointments/check ups, derealization, memory loss

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"So... new kid on the block," Puffy addresses, gazing at him from where she sits across from him. "How's that going?"

Tommy likes Puffy. It had been hard to switch over five months ago after a year of seeing his old therapist, but Puffy is great in her own ways. She doesn't put up with his bullshit and pushes him to be honest with himself and do better. She challenges him, which is exactly what Tommy needs.

She also used to be in the military which Tommy thinks is pretty badass. A captain apparently. She used to fly planes. Like he said, pretty badass.

Wilbur had been a bit wary of that, giving Tommy an odd look when he mentioned it before talking about the military, politics, and corruption. Tommy had learned a lot that day and it had shattered a lot of his beliefs about the nation's security systems. Tommy brought it up the next session.

Puffy had laughed and asked why he thought she did what she did now. Tommy thought that was fair enough.

"New kid?" Puffy prompts again.

It puts Tommy back on track. He hadn't even realized he'd gotten lost down a rabbit hole of thought.

"'s been fine," Tommy responds half-heartedly.

Puffy raises an eyebrow.

Tommy huffs.

"No really," he insists, "I just..." he shrugs.

Puffy gives him a look, leans back in her chair, and waits.

Tommy drums his fingers on his knee, thinking of how to phrase his thoughts. Emotions and feelings are hard and it's a struggle to put everything that's been going on with him into words. He starts pinching at his pants instead, rubbing the fabric between his fingers.

"It's just that, I dunno it's hard connecting to him."

Puffy looks at him openly.

"What do you mean by that?" she asks.

Tommy shrugs and takes his fidget cube from his pocket.

"I dunno," he admits, "I just- I kinda feel that I'm doing everything wrong. I know... I mean I know how hard it can be to show up in like a new place again and again. And Ranboo was pulled because his old house was shit, right? And I get that, I understand. I feel like I can relate to him," Tommy sighs,

"But every time I try to talk to him, I mess up," Tommy explains. He shifts in his seat, tucking his feet under him. "Take the other day- we were talking about Techno and he got... sorta upset I guess? And I don't even know what I did wrong!"

Puffy nods, letting them both sit in silence for a moment. Tommy shifts in his seat again, slightly uncomfortable as the silence continues to press down.

"Walk me through it?" she requests.

So he does. He talks about bringing up Techno's garden and Ranboo not remembering who that was so Tommy explains. He thinks he did an okay job at that too. He didn't- well Tomy's memory isn't like Ranboo's. He doesn't have memory loss. But he does have ADHD and memory issues are a part of that diagnosis. Old families used to get mad at him when he forgot stuff. He did his best not to do that to Ranboo. It isn't his fault.

Following that, he told Ranboo about Wilbur and Techno and how Ranboo probably wouldn't meet Techno until the summer. Tommy didn't think he had done anything wrong but then Ranboo had started talking about months and Tommy had made a bit of a snarky comment, but it wasn't mean. And then- and then Ranboo had shifted, gotten up and left his side and practically ignored him.

Tommy has no idea where he went wrong.

"Okay," Puffy says, "Let's go through this, sound good?"

Tommy nods and they do and god is he so grateful for a therapist because Puffy helps walk him through the scenario, look at things from a different angle and suddenly so many things start to make more sense.

The first part- about Ranboo forgetting about who Techno was and Tommy explaining kindly but Ranboo still seeming a bit off, that can be chalked up to Ranboo's response. Tommy did his best to be supportive in the situation, but he has to take in account that Ranboo has his own relation with his memory loss and could feel awkward talking about it or been in bad situations with forgetting things before.

"And," Puffy comments, "With Wil and Techno, it seems like Ranboo only started to get upset towards the end, when you mentioned summer, any ideas why?"

"No," Tommy insists. He clenches his hands slightly. He hates not knowing, hates being the cause of a problem, "No like- it was, we talked about months how Techno wouldn't be here until summer and then he got really sensitive when we talked about how summer was still a few months away. It was like- like it doesn't make sense to him."

"Why wouldn't it make sense?" Puffy asks.

"I don't know," Tommy huffs, getting a bit frustrated at this point, "Does he not want to meet Techno? Or maybe he doesn't like the summer- but he got so sensitive over the month parts and, and, and- oh."

Tommy's had a bit of a realization.

"Oh what?" Puffy asks, a smile starting to twitch at the corner of her mouth.

"Ranboo- I don't think Ranboo thinks he's going to stay here until summer. That's why he got all weird when I mentioned he'd meet Techno in the summer. 'Cause he doesn't think he'll be here, so why would he meet Techno?"

He looks back up at Puffy.

"But you knew that," he challenges.

"Guilty," Puffy admits, "So what are you going to do about it?"

That's a good question. They work on problem solving from there. Tommy works on acknowledging what he can do to better his relationship with Ranboo. He also works on accepting that he is only one person and he can only do so much. A friendship between him and Ranboo requires them both, and Ranboo might not be up for that. Even if Tommy does everything right- and he probably won't, but mistakes happen and that's okay- they still might not get along right away.

But that's okay.

It is. It is.

Right, so maybe Tommy's having a little bit of a hard time accepting that, but he's working on it.

That same night after his therapy session a weird thing happens.

He wakes up and hears the sound of crying wafting from downstairs. He moves to get out of bed and see what was going on, but finds that he can't. He can't leave his bed, much less move at all. So he stares straight up at his ceiling, unblinking as sobs come from the floor below.

The strange experience lasts for seemingly hours, and then the next thing Tommy knows he's waking up the next morning. It felt so real and yet...

He passes it off as a weird dream lingering from his therapy session.

He tries to follow Puffy's advice in the next week and trying to manage school with therapy work is sort of exhausting and on Friday afternoon he is so ready to be done for the week. Plus, Wilbur's picking him up today.

Tommy can't help the little bounce of excitement and flap of his hands when his eldest brother swings the car up to the curb. His mouth splits into a giant grin, and he charges for the door, wrenching it open as he leaps into the car and slams the door closed behind him.

Wilbur laughs at his antics, but is quick to pull away from the curb. Tommy lets his hands flap a bit more with the excess energy, leg bouncing in tandem.

"Happy to see me?" Wilbur teases, as if this doesn't happen whenever Wilbur stays for the weekend.

"No," Tommy lies, "Just glad to get out of school, bitch."

"Hmm, sure," Wilbur agrees, rolling his eyes.

Tommy lets him because it's Wil and sits eagerly in the car as they head out for ice cream. It was something they started a long time ago, before Wilbur had moved out, before Tommy had even been adopted. It had started after Wilbur took him out to an ice cream place to explain why therapy was so important to him. Tommy holds that day closely, and since then ice cream with Wilbur has become a sort of tradition.

But to Tommy's surprise, they go straight when they usually turn right, heading home instead. Tommy sits up, looking at the turn as it fades behind them before turning to Wilbur when it hurts to turn his neck that much.

"Aren't we getting ice cream?" he asks.

"Course. Thought we'd drop by the house first and grab Ranboo."

Tommy hesitates, and he's not sure why. It makes sense to invite Ranboo, honestly Tommy can see why it would be sort of rude to go without him, but part of Tommy doesn't want to. Ice cream had always been a him and Wilbur thing, and he's not super eager to change it.

Wilbur glances at him, frowns, and switches lanes. Tommy doesn't realize what he's doing until he makes a u-turn. They're going back.

"No, it's okay," Tommy says, "we can grab Ranboo."

He can do this. He can set a good example, be a good brother for Ranboo just like Techno and Wil were for him.

"Nah," Wilbur decides, "We'll just bring him something back. Do you know what ice cream he likes?"

Tommy shakes his head.

"Text him, Dad too. He'd kill us if we got everyone but him ice cream, especially because it'll mean I get to use his credit card."

"Nice," Tommy snorts.

"Speaking of adulting," Wilbur asks, turning on the blinkers again as he pulls into the parking lot. "Have you thought about getting your license?"

"Oh you didn't hear?" Tommy asks.

Wilbur frowns.

"Heard what?" he asks as he parks. Tommy pauses as they both unbuckle their seatbelts and leave the car, heading towards the small ice cream shop.

"Tubbo drove for pretty much his first time, crashed into a hill," Tommy says, "Since then I've decided I'll stay in the passenger's seat, thanks. I'm fine with my permit expiring."

Wilbur snorts.

They pause, looking at the ice cream options. It's one of the things Wilbur and him share in common, they both like to try new ice cream flavors.

Phil usually gets the same thing, though he'll look at new flavors whenever they come through.

Techno will look at all of the flavors, as if he'd actually considered getting something different before ordering the exact same thing as the time before. Tommy's convinced the act of looking is just as much a part of Techno's routine as ordering the same thing.

Ranboo apparently wants mint chip. Who knows if that'll become a pattern.

But they'll grab Phil's and Ranboo's after they're done, so they don't melt.

Tommy chooses a strawberry chocolate while Wil selects something with nuts, and soon enough they're sitting by the window.

Tommy rocks his feet under the table, a simple casual stim he's particularly fond of and finds himself automatically doing more often than not.

A bird flies past the window and Tommy's eyes go to it, watching as the thing flies into a tree and hops along its branches.

"-Tommy?"

Tommy jerks back to Wilbur.

"Huh?" He says, realizing he had been too distracted to catch whatever Wilbur did. "I was looking at a bird," he admits.

Wilbur peers in the direction he was looking at.

"What bird?" he asks.

"That one," Tommy says, and does his best to point it out. It takes Wilbur a few seconds, but he eventually locks onto the branch with the bird.

The two of them watch the small thing together in silence for a bit, until it gets bored of whatever it was doing and flies away.

It's only then Tommy pulls attention back to Wil.

"What were you saying?" he asks.

"Not much, just asking how you've been."

Tommy grins a bit and begins to recount the past week to Wilbur. Wilbur- the ever attentive older brother- soaks it all in and nods along. He congratulates Tommy on his maths test and sympathizes when Tommy says he feels like he's messed up with Ranboo.

"I'm sure he doesn't hate you," Wilbur promises, "it's new for everyone, y'know?"

"Yeah, I guess," Tommy hesitates, "but all of you were so great when I joined."

Wilbur barks out a laugh.

"No we were not," he insists. "You just didn't notice, you weren't on our side of things, yeah? Now you are. Plus Techno and me had more time to prep. You weren't an emergency placement."

Which is... well that's fair. Tommy hadn't really thought of it that way before. Wilbur has a point.

"What about you?" Tommy asks, "what's up with you?"

Wilbur gives him a smile and begins to talk about college. He talks about his music and where his songs are taking him and he talks about his own geography class that has him

absolutely hooked.

But his life goes so much further than school. He tells Tommy about his housemates and their game night, about a new podcast that's caught his interest, and his latest doctor's appointment.

"Wait, you went to the doctors?" Tommy asks. His eyebrows furrow, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine," Wilbur promises, "just a normal checkup. Doctor's just need to check some shit every once in a while, y'know?"

"But you're okay," Tommy insists.

Wilbur softens.

"Yeah I'm good Tommy, promise."

Tommy gives him a suspicious look, but Wilbur just returns it with a smile. Okay. Good.

"I—" Tommy hesitates, "How do I bond with Ranboo?"

"You're asking me?" Wilbur snorts.

Tommy gives a small nod.

"Tommy you are way more extroverted than me," Wilbur says, "I dunno, just like... spend time with him. You keep bringing this up. I think- Tommy look you can't make him like you."

"But I don't want him to hate me," Tommy protests.

"Tommy, what I mean," Wilbur inputs, "Is I think you're making this into a bigger deal than it is. Just... let it happen. Alright?"

But... But that's way too simple. And Tommy has always had a problem letting things go, letting things be.

"You're sure?" he asks Wilbur.

Wilbur nods.

"You're really playing into the older brother role right now y'know," Tommy says.

"Stop. I will cry," Wilbur immediately responds, and then adds, "I'd better fucking hope so. Worked pretty hard getting to that point, y'know."

Yeah. Tommy knows.

They carry on for a while over ice cream. When they finish they throw their trash away and order Phil's and Ranboo's. Tommy holds them both in the car, hoping they won't melt on him.

And that's how Wilbur's introduction to Ranboo goes, a chat over ice cream.

Ranboo seems a bit torn, obviously wanting to talk to Wilbur, but with a melting ice cream on his hands.

"So Ranboo," Wilbur says when they've gotten past introductions. "Any hobbies?"

Ranboo swallows his bite of ice cream, spoon hovering above the small bowl.

"Uh... I like writing?" He offers.

"Cool," Wilbur says, peeking up at his words, "I like writing too. Music more than stories though."

Ranboo nods.

"I uh... like character writing I guess," Ranboo admits.

Wilbur springs off of that, asking Ranboo about things he likes to write and character traits he enjoys. Wilbur in turn shares his love of songwriting.

"I like music a lot too," Ranboo eventually adds, "not.. not writing it, but uh, listening. I like Lemon Demon a lot. And the Undertale soundtrack."

Tommys head instantly lifts at that comment.

"Undertale?" he says, "I love game soundtracks."

Ranboo gives him a small smile.

"Currently I'm obsessed with the Animal Crossing soundtracks," Tommy explains, "Able Sisters is a favorite and I also play the game and it's so wonderful. I wasn't sure how much I'd like it cause I'm usually a fan of more intense games, but then again I do love Pokemon which can be relaxed. But Pokemon also has battles and gyms and Animal Crossing has none of that.

"Plus the look of it is gorgeous," Tommy goes on, "not only the soundtrack, the visual elements of it too. The coloring is beautiful and the customization makes so many options possible. It's definitely one of my favorite games. Tubbo will play it with me sometimes."

Tommy comes to an end to his impromptu infodump, flushing slightly as he realizes he's dominated the conversation. It's one of those adhd things he knows he shouldn't have to apologize for, but every learned bit of enforced social ettique has him screaming to fix.

But Wilbur gives him a smile and Tommy knows he wouldn't fake it. It's okay, he's allowed to talk about his interests.

"Oh. I think I've heard some of the soundtrack too," Ranboo admits, seemingly entranced by Tommy's rant. As he talks, he rocks back and forth gently. "I don't think I've ever played it though."

Tommy flaps his hands a bit, wiggling in his seat.

"If you want you can play on my switch to try it out," he offers, "or if you don't want to play you can watch a play through or watch me play. Like I said, it's my favorite game right now, so I play it a lot."

Ranboo perks up slightly, wide eyes watching him.

"That sounds nice," he offers carefully. "Maybe I can also show you Undertale sometime?"

Finally, they have common ground again and Tommy's not being an asshole. He really does want Ranboo to feel welcome here.

Wilbur's doing a great job of that. Two minutes into meeting Ranboo he's striking up an easy conversation and Ranboo makes him laugh in response.

Something twinges inside of Tommy. It took him weeks, months, to get comfortable with Wilbur, to find his place here, and it seems like Ranboo's doing all that and more in a matter of minutes. Tommy had worked so hard to build those relationships, and somehow Ranboo's already gone and done it.

It's not really fair, is it?

Either way, it's nice to have Wilbur over for the weekend.

Tommy always misses him and it's weird being the only child at home. Wilbur and Techno had moved out at the same time, Techno all the way to California. The stark difference had been hard, but Wilbur visiting made the transition a lot easier for all parties.

But Wil's only here for a weekend and then school hits full force, only this time Ranboo is here to suffer with him. He didn't join him the past week or so, Tommy doesn't really know why.

They're in the same grade, which Tommy takes as a bonus. His ego's still slightly hurt from finding out that Ranboo is older than him. At least the age gap doesn't extend grades.

Ranboo's pretty flighty, hunched and nervous the entire time he shows him around the school. The entire time he scribbles notes on his journal. Eventually Tommy drops him off at his first class and parts ways to his own.

He doesn't hear from Ranboo until lunch.

He's just sat down with Tubbo when he gets a text.

Ranboo: is it okay if I sit with u for lunch?

Tommy: sure bigman. Left of the cafeteria

Ranboo: where is that?

Tommy: I showed it to u earlier

Ranboo: um okay

Ranboo: sry I still don't know where that is

Ranboo: sorry

Tommy sighs and pops a grape into his mouth. He sets his lunch aside and stumbles to his feet.

Tommy: where r u, I'll come find u

As he waits for Ranboos reply, he addresses Tubbo who's staring curiously at him.

"I'm grabbing Ranboo," Tommy mutters, phone capturing his attention when it flashes with a text, "I'll only be a minute."

Tubbo frowns up at him.

"What did you say?"

"I'm grabbing Ranboo," Tommy repeats, and then he disappears.

He finds Ranboo exactly where the other had said he would be. He's quite an easy person to find, considering his height. Tommy flags him down, Ranboos eyes sparkling with familiarity and he stumbles toward him.

"Hey Big Man," Tommy greets when he's close enough that he doesn't have to shout, "this way."

He leads Ranboo back to where Tubbo and him always eat lunch together, just the two of them. Ranboo follows him like lost puppy, only ever a millimeter behind, and more often than not tripping over his own feet.

They make it back to Tubbo, and when they sit, Tubbo immediately jumps to introduce himself.

"Hi!" he greets. If a voice could sparkle, Tommy thinks that's what Tubbo's voice would be doing right now. "Tubbo, Tommy's best friend," he says for an introduction. Tommy would never admit it, but his chest swells slightly with praise at the statement. He's Tubbo's best friend. "You must be Ranboo."

Ranboo gives a tiny nod, and tenses up.

"Nice to meet you," he mumbles. He gently swings his backpack off his shoulder and Tommy notices his hand are kind of red.

Tubbo frowns.

"Uh, yeah, you too," he says, much less enthusiastic all of a sudden. Tommy wonders at the change of behavior that seemed to come from nowhere. But before he can question Tubbo, a

smile is back on his face and he's asking Ranboo a new question.

"Are your hands okay?" Tubbo asks.

"Oh," Ranboo looks down at his hands that are slightly splotched with red. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"What'd you do?" Tommy asks.

"Uh, we just had to wash our hands in science. And I talked to the teacher but—" Ranboo shrugs, "Whatever. It's going away now."

Tommy wants to say more, but he doesn't know what, so he keeps quiet and lets the conversation move on.

Ranboo's decently quiet at first, obviously nervous. But soon enough he's opening up and chatting back and forth with them both, falling into easy camaraderie.

He's easy to talk to, which Tommy likes. He struggles with people a lot. Most of them find him too loud or too annoying or they think his interests are weird. But Ranboo seems genuinely interested in Tommy's love for video games and the music that goes along with them. He also laughs at Tubbo's weird dreams instead of finding them disturbing. He likes Tubbo's bee facts and asks questions about hives and the different types.

He even takes notes on some of that.

At some point Tubbo asks what he's doing and Ranboo sheepishly curls up.

"I uh, have a bad memory," he says, "So I'm writing down who you are and that you have weird dreams and like bees and stuff. It helps me- uh keep it in one place for when I forget."

Tubbo frowns.

"Do you forget that sort of stuff often?"

Ranboo looks up, meeting Tubbo's eyes for just a millisecond before ducking his head again.

"Uh yeah," he admits, "I'll probably forget like... main things less often if I'm around you a lot though. It kinda just depends."

"Oh, that sounds like it would suck," Tubbo acknowledges.

A small, sudden laugh comes from Ranboo.

"I mean yeah," he agrees, "But I'm used to it I guess."

Tommy should be happy, he should. Tubbo and Ranboo are getting along. But something inside of him sinks.

It was just the other day Tommy learned about Ranboo's memory issues and he had completely butchered that conversation, while Tubbo seems to be managing just fine. Tommy

had been trying and Phil said- Phil said he was trying and it was okay and people make mistakes.

But Tubbo's been talking to Ranboo for all of ten minutes and he's got Ranboo laughing while the only thing Tommy did was make Ranboo uncomfortable.

A hint of insecurity starts to form, curling up deep within him and he desperately pushes it aside and hopes to not acknowledge it. He made a mistake, whatever. Tubbo's already getting along better with Ranboo than he is. That's a good thing! Ranboo seems nice.

It's, it's okay. He's okay. This'll work out.

He told Phil it was okay for Ranboo to join their mismatch family. He's not exactly going to go back on that.

It's an adjustment period, that's all. He'll figure it out.

Tommys thinking about all of those things when he notices that Tubbo's following Tommy and Ranboo to the bus after school two weeks later. Wait. Tubbo's following Ranboo and him back to the bus?

"Are you coming with us?" Tommy asks.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "Ranboo and I are going to work on homework together. We have health together."

Tommy looks at Ranboo, then Tubbo.

"You do?" he asks.

Tommy doesn't have any classes with Tubbo this year. It sucks. But at least they had been alone together. Now Ranboo shares a class with Tubbo.

"Yeah," Tubbo frowns, "did neither of us tell you?"

Tommy shakes his head.

"Well it's great," Tubbo says with a laugh, "that class is so boring. It's nice having a friend."

Something wriggles in Tommy's stomach and he looks over at Ranboo. He has a small smile on his face as he looks at Tubbo.

"Yeah it's nice," Ranboo agrees.

"And Ranboo's really fucking smart," Tubbo says, "he knows a lot of shit about random things."

"No I don't," Ranboo protests, "I barely even know what's going on in that class."

"I didn't mean the class," Tubbo dismisses instantly, "Health is stupid. But earlier you were telling me all about the Titanic. You knew all those cool facts."

Ranboo shrugs.

"I was just really into the Titanic as a kid," he explains.

Tommy looks between the two of them, feeling out of place. His steps falter and he falls a half space behind them. It works out cause the sidewalk is narrowing anyways and there's really only space for two people to walk next to each other.

"Yeah well, we have health homework and it's stupid so we're going to work on it together," Tubbo says.

"Oh," Tommy says. Tubbo gives him an odd look, probably noticing how subdued Tommy is. Which, well Tommy is subdued. But that doesn't make sense. Tubbo's coming over! They'll have a great time.

When they get home Tommy races upstairs to his room really quick to drop his bag off like usual before rushing back down to meet Ranboo and Tubbo. Maybe they can play Mario Kart or something, a game they can all play together.

But Ranboo and Tubbo are missing from the living room.

Tommy frowns, and looks toward the kitchen, but they're still missing. The house seems empty.

That's weird.

Tommy goes to check Ranboo's room.

He swings down the hall, opening the door to what used to be Phil's office.

"Oh," he says when he opens it. Tubbo and Ranboo are on the floor, looking over their textbooks and paper.

They both look up as he makes a noise.

"You're already doing homework?" he asks.

He thought maybe they'd play some games first, mess around. Y'know, wind down from after school like Tubbo and him usually do.

Tubbo gives a frown and a small shrug.

"We have a lot of homework Tommy," Tubbo admits, "maybe later."

"Yeah," Ranboo agrees, "we still need to have that rainbow road rematch."

"Right," Tommy says, still hovering. "I-"

"Hey Ranboo what did you- oh sorry Tommy," Tubbo says as they speak over one another.

"Y'know you can come in if you want," Ranboo says.

Tommy quickly shakes his head. He knows when he's being dismissed.

"No it's okay," he insists, "I uh, have my own homework I need to get to anyways. Y'know?"

"Okay," Tubbo says. Ranboo gives a nod. Neither of them look up.

"Bye Tommy," Tubbo says. And gosh couldn't he at least sound a little bit bummed about it?

Tommy leaves without another word.

Chapter End Notes

them bois

(also cat isn't feeling the best. hopefully it's nothing bad and she'll be fine soon)

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

fall from grace

Chapter Summary

Ranboo continues to settle in almost perfectly and Tommy reflects on how rough it was for him at first. But maybe it's not as easy on Ranboo as Tommy thinks.

Chapter Notes

CW: self worth issues, internalized ableism, jealousy, feelings of inadequacy, throwing up, fairly graphic description of self harm (cutting), discussion of addiction (self harm), discussion of dissociation, blood

bc this chapter has two pretty common triggers i know people need to avoid, ive included some extra info abt where they start and end. gen summaries for these scenes will be included in end notes.

throwing up

- start: "All he wants to do is curl over in his bed and go back to sleep"
- end: "Awkwardly Tommy shuffles in, stiffly holding out the glass."

self harm (actual description):

- start: "Tommy thinks they might even be on the way to friends now."
- end: "He doesn't stay long."

self harm (continued discussion/reflection):

- start: same as above
- end: "If there's any place where things turn out alright, it's here."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo's adjusting. He's adjusting well. Very well. He isn't getting into fights and he's talking with Phil and Tommy. He laughs and smiles and talks about his interests. He gets along great with Tubbo, and Tommy finds the two of them making their own inside jokes.

Ranboo flourishes in his first week and Tommy hates it.

He hates that Ranboo's doing so well

It's stupid, he knows it is.

Ranboo doing well is a good thing. Him feeling comfortable, him fitting in, that's the desirable outcome.

But Tommy can't help feeling a little bit jealous. Because it took him almost a whole year to get to this place of comfort that Ranboo has now. Tommy made so many mistakes and pushed people away. It took him weeks to even really talk to Tubbo and much longer to invite him over.

But in a few weeks Ranboo's already done that and more.

And when they go shopping- when they go shopping Ranboo asks for things, something Tommy hadn't been able to do.

"Can I- can I get a new notebook?" Ranboo asks, peering back at Phil, "my current memory book is almost full."

"Course mate. Pick out a nice one, sturdy, whatever you want," Phil insists.

Ranboo goes on. He even spots a cute plush in the toy aisle, gasping and straight out asking Phil if it's okay if he gets it. He asks... no holds barred. He just... goes for it. Tommy had barely been able to gather the courage to step into the kid's toy aisles when he first arrived, much less pick things out for himself.

Phil easily agrees to the toy and Ranboo hops on tip toes before picking it up and rubbing it softly with his hand, marvelling over the texture. He pulls one hand away from it to scrub harshly at his face and makes a small noise- almost chuff like. Soon enough he pulls the hand away and returns both to the plush, diligently carrying it through the rest of the store, refusing to set it down in the cart.

Tommy watches the entire interaction, sees how happy both Ranboo and Phil are and something inside of him hurts. It's so easy for Ranboo and it was never that easy for him.

Phil probably loves that, loves having a kid that makes sense and doesn't flip on him every two minutes. Ranboo's handling everything much better than Tommy ever did.

This new found revaluation has Tommy sulking around the house quite frequently.

"What's going on?" Phil asks him one day, settling in the couch at Tommy's side as he stares at a quit game screen. He's been staring at the same screen for almost ten minutes now.

Tommy shrugs.

And god he can't even do that right. Ranboo would probably tell Phil something was wrong and then they'd talk and work through it but Tommy's just difficult and a jerk and he makes everything harder than he should.

He knows Phil loves him, but Tommys not exactly making his job easy.

"Toms," Phil presses gently.

"Do you ever wish I was more like Ranboo?" He asks suddenly, barely pausing before the words all tumble out like a damn breaking.

Phil frowns, and reaches a hand out to him as he sits next to Tommy.

Tommy lets his own hand fall into his. Phil squeezes it softly for a moment before using his thumb to run soothing circles on the back of it.

"No," Phil says, "never." His voice is clear and steady and his posture unflinching. Everything about him screams genuinity and Tommy... he wants to believe him. But...

"Why not?" he asks, "Ranboos... he's settling in a lot quicker than I did."

If he were Phil, he'd much prefer a kid like Ranboo.

"It seems like it," Phil agrees, "but what works for Ranboo doesn't work for everyone else."

"Okay yeah," Tommy agrees, "but wouldn't it have been easier if I had settled in as quickly as Ranboo has?"

"Easier?" Phil says, "sure. Better?" Phil gives a small shrug of indecision. "Obviously you were hurting, and if there's anything I can do to help stop my children from hurting, I'm going to do my best to help relieve that pain. But Tommy, there was something special about working to earn your trust and teaching you it was okay to be who you are."

Phil sighs.

"It's... not- I don't wish you were more like Ranboo. That's not the sort of thing I wish for. I wish for you to be the best version of yourself because I love you for who you are and want to see those traits amplified tenfold as you grow."

Tommy sniffls, only just recognizing the latest tears that fall from his eyes. He rubs them away quickly.

"That's so fucking sappy," he huffs.

Phil gives him a smile and a gentle squeeze of hand.

"I love you," he promises.

"Love you too Dad," Tommy grumbles.

"Maybe something to bring up in therapy, yeah?" Phil then suggests.

And well he has a point. Tommy falls into his side, letting his father pull him close and nods off with his head on his chest, listening to his steady heartbeat.

He sleeps better those next few days than he has in over a week.

When he wakes up, it's much too early. In fact, he grabs his phone to check the time, wondering what woke him because he's much too tired to have been natural. He checked and oh wow, jeez it's early.

It's six am.

It's six am on a weekend and Tommy does not want to be up at this time, hell no. All he wants to do is curl over in his bed and go back to sleep.

But the distant sound of puking is pretty disruptive. And sure, maybe it has him a bit concerned.

Tommy sighs, and clamors out of bed.

He heads to the bathroom and is greeted with his brother's head in a toilet. Wil retches once more and Tommy winces in sympathy.

"Wil?" he calls out gently, standing at the door.

Wil pants, a slight sweaty sheen to his skin.

"Morning Tommy," he groans.

"Are you okay?" he asks- but well that's a bit redundant because no Wil is obviously not okay if he's puking his guts out, "do you want me to get Dad?"

"Yes please," Wil manages.

Tommy nods, even though Wil doesn't see it. He darts away from his door and into his father's room. He only hesitates for a second at the door, deciding Wil's health comes first.

Phil is still in bed, sound asleep. Usually Tommy would feel a bit bad for waking him up, bit...

Well extenuating circumstances and all that. Is he even using that word correctly? Whatever.

"Dad," he whispers gently. He doesn't stir.

"Dad, Phil," he insists a bit louder, and then gently shakes him.

Phil startles awake with a gasp, quickly sitting up. Tommy jumps back.

"Wha- Tommy?" he asks, "ev'thing alright?" he asks, voice heavy with sleep.

"Wil's puking," Tommy explains, "he wants you."

That immediately wakes Phil up a bit more and he stumbles out of bed quickly, slipping his feet in the slippers on the floor. He shuffles forward with a yawn, and Tommy follows him as he leaves the room and heads to the bathroom across the hall.

Phil immediately winces as he sees Wilbur hovering over the toilet bowl.

"Can you go grab some water for Wil, Tommy?" he asks as he enters the bathroom and goes to Wilbur's side.

Tommy gives a quick nod and scurries away, heading for the stairs.

He heads straight to the kitchen filling up a water glass with shaky hands and immediately heading back to the stairs. A little bit of water sloshes out and onto the stairs, but Tommy could care less.

His feet echo on each step and not much later he's hovering outside the bathroom door again.

Phil's crouched on the floor with Wilbur, hand on his book and muttering to him in a soothing tone.

Wilbur is panting and he looks exhausted but he seems to have stopped throwing up. He looks up at the sight of Tommy.

Awkwardly Tommy shuffles in, stiffly holding out the glass. Wilbur takes it with a smile and a muttered thank you. Tommy frowns at him, wanting to ask but not knowing if he should.

"I'm okay," Wilbur says, "go back to bed Tommy. It's a Saturday. Sleep in.*

"You sure?" Tommy asks.

He doesn't want to leave Wilbur if he isn't feeling well. Sure Wilbur has Phil with him, but still...

"I'm good," Wilbur promises, "go get some rest kiddo."

"Not a kid," Tommy huffs, "I'm a big man."

But either way he listens, returning to his own room and slipping under his own covers for a few more hours of sleep. Hopefully Wilbur is okay.

Wilbur seems to be fine when he goes back to college that Monday and Tommy heads to school, which is a good sign. Tommy thinks a bit about him during school, slightly worried, but pushing it off. He probably got food poisoning or something. No sense in worrying needlessly.

He makes it through the rest of the school day and meets up with Ranboo after school to catch the bus home. Tommy could learn to drive- but he really really doesn't want to, so this will have to do.

Plus, they're walking down the street and up the front porch steps soon enough.

"I want to do editing," Tommy announces confidently as he pushes open the front door.

He marches into the house, Ranboo his awkward oversized shadow. No one is there to greet him and hear his magnificent announcement. Well that won't do.

"PHIL!" He calls loudly, voice echoing through the house. Ranboo winces at his volume from behind him.

He waits, tapping his foot impatiently and scooting a bit further into the house. He drops his bag on his floor just as Phil comes down from the stairs.

"Tommy, did you really need to shout?" Phil asks.

"Yes," Tommy confirms. Absolutely he needed to. He needs something grand to capture Phil's attention. Yelling was the perfect solution.

"Yes Tommy?" he asks. But before Tommy can get a word in edgewise. "Do you want a snack?" Phil asks.

It's such a dad thing for Phil to ask him if he wants an after school snack when he is almost an adult and perfectly capable of making his own food. It's one of an endless list of things Tommy loves about him. He nods, following Phil into the kitchen, Ranboo still hanging behind him.

"Dad I want to go to uni for editing," Tommy explains, "Like I already enjoyed it- but in my computer class we were actually talking about how to make a career out of it and my teacher said I did really good on my recent assignment and he gave me a list of schools to look at and-" Tommy scrambling comes to a stop, the emotions that are welling up inside him so strong that he can't get a word out around them. He bounces a few times and shakes his entire body at it, hair flying through the air. He lets an odd 'eep' noise which is a little bit of an embarrassing stim, but he does it again because it feels nice.

"Yeah?" Phil asks.

Tommy nods furiously. He begins a small infodump about why editing is so great and about the software and techniques. They've been studying algorithms lately, looking at why some videos work and others don't. Tommy loves it and he wants to share his love and passion with those that he loves.

Phil listens to it all as he brings them strawberries, cheese, and crackers. Phil and Ranboo get tea, but Phil slides him a coke instead. Good, Tommy isn't a heathen. Ranboo seems to listen as well, taking slow sips as he observes Tommy.

Tommy eventually comes down from his high of excess energy and pure excitement, hopping a little in his seat even as his speech comes to an end.

"That's amazing," Phil says, "I know editing's something you've always been passionate about and it's so cool to see your excitement. If you want to look at school I can help you with that later?"

Tommy nods again and then stuffs his face with crackers.

Phil snorts at his behavior and turns to Ranboo.

"How was your day Ranboo? What did you do?"

Ranboo jumps a bit at the attention, gaze going to meet Phil's before instantly tearing it away. He taps his hand on his knee and stops chewing on his lip.

"Oh uh, I..." Ranboo trails off, frown forming on his face. His eyebrows furrow and he looks to the ground. "I don't know," he admits a second later, voice quiet.

Ranboo doesn't always forget things Tommy's found, and when he does it's usually recent stuff. Sometimes it'll come back to him later, but a lot of it still has gaps and holes. Tommy's doing his best to learn all that he can so he can best support Ranboo.

Phil gives a small nod.

"Did you write it down?" he asks, gentle and kind.

"Oh, yeah, probably," Ranboo agrees, and then goes digging in his backpack for his journal. He pulls it out, flipping it open so it's still tilted away from Phil and Tommy. Tommy doesn't really get why he's so private and protective of the thing, but whatever. It's Ranboo's, and he respects his privacy.

"Uh, I went to my class, turned in homework, got homework," Ranboo skims, "Oh! In my health class me and Tubbo are doing a project together!"

Wait, what?

"You and Tubbo?" Tommy repeats.

"Mhmm?" Ranboo confirms.

"Wait, did you ask him, or..."

Ranboo frowns again.

"I don't know if it was like- assigned groups or what," he admits, "why?"

Oh. Right, of course. Lots of times you get assigned groups for projects. And even if they didn't get assigned, of course Ranboo chose Tubbo. Tubbo's like the only kid Ranboo knows in the whole school besides him. It makes sense. Nothing to spend time thinking about.

"You're doing a project in health class?" Phil asks.

"Mmm," Ranboo agrees, "We're gonna be dads."

Phil pales.

"What?"

Tomy laughs at his horrified expression and Ranboo instantly goes red and splutters.

"Like a doll- it's- we have to take care of one of those robot babies for class together," he explains.

Phil lets out a huge sigh of relief.

"Oh thank God," he says.

"Yeah. We named him Michael. It's a whole thing now," Ranboo admits.

Tommy snorts.

"Michael, seriously, you couldn't have come up with something better?"

Ranboo raises his eyebrows in challenge.

"Would you have preferred Tommy junior?"

"Oh pog, hell yeah," Tommy agrees, "everyone should name their kid after me."

Ranboo shares a look with Phil and they burst into laughter. Tommy is quick to join in. Ranboo's not half bad, really.

He likes Ranboo, he does. He's a little bit jealous, but he's a big enough man to admit that. He'll get over it, eventually. He just needs to push those feelings to the side.

And that works a little bit! Tommy shoves his jealousy and intrusive thoughts aside, not giving them any time of day and works on getting along with Ranboo.

Tommy shows him Animal Crossing and Pokemon and Ranboo seems to enjoy the games as well. Maybe not as much as Tommy... but he's certainly engaged. It's something Tommy can connect to him over and they're talking and things aren't so awkward and that's something!

Tommy thinks they might even be on the way to friends now.

And that's when Tommy finds Ranboo cutting himself in the bathroom, blood from his wrists dripping into his lap.

"Oh shit!" Tommy swears.

Ranboo jumps, looking up at him.

"I didn't mean to," he immediately stutters out.

Shit. Tommy wasn't supposed to see this, was he?

"Sorry, you weren't... this wasn't... you shouldn't of seen this," Ranboo mutters.

Tommy stares. Ranboo's words make sense at least, and Tommy recognizes that they have a deeper meaning than just not wanting to be found.

Tommy shouldn't have seen this, he never uses the bathroom upstairs when there's one right next to his room. But well- he had been downstairs.

He really wasn't supposed to see this.

He stumbles for what to do.

Honestly, Ranboo seems to be dealing with all of this better than he is, already beginning to wipe away the blood on his arms and clean up.

"I—" Tommy stutters, because there's something he should be doing, right?

"I'm going to get Phil," Tommy offers. Ranboo nods, and doesn't argue. Tommy breathes out a sigh of relief. He doesn't know what he'd do if Ranboo had told him not to get Phil.

So he goes to his dad's room, and knocks on the door. He's invited in and Phil stands immediately from his desk when he sees the look on Tommy's face.

"What's wrong?" he asks, face going pale.

Tommy gestures weakly downstairs.

"It's Ranboo," he explains.

He doesn't stay long. He makes sure his dad actually does locate Ranboo and then slips away when he's not needed. He sort of wants to stay, listen in on the whispers his dad and Ranboo exchange, but it feels out of place and invasive.

If there's something important that he needs to know, Phil will tell him. He trusts Phil. So he steps away and goes to his room. He's watched two of his siblings fall apart in the bathroom recently. Tommy's really not sure what it is.

His hands shake the entire night, but that's the only time he really gets to mull over it.

Ranboo confronts him the next afternoon.

"I'm sorry about the other day," he says.

Tommy nods and accepts, pretty sure he knows where this is going.

Ranboo sighs and runs a hand through his hair.

"I'm addicted to self harm," he admits, "it's- I'm working on it, but I still slip up sometimes. I uhm- I've stopped for the most part. But I deal with dissociation and uh- sometimes when I dissociate I still hurt myself."

Tommy's never dissociated before he doesn't think. Techno has a few times, and he's described what the experience is like to Tommy, and shit it sounded terrible. He didn't know it was something Ranboo struggles with. That sucks man.

"Addiction can work like that?" Tommy blurts out, mouth moving faster than his thoughts once more. Dammit.

"Yeah," Ranboo says.

"Oh. Huh, that sucks."

Ranboo gives a short half hearted chuckle. Tommy doesn't get him.

"You're taking this surprisingly calmly," Ranboo points out.

Tommy shrugs. What is he supposed to say? Yeah it fucking sucked seeing Ranboo slicing his wrists into bits in the bathroom but he told Phil and he's doing his best not to be a dick and to listen so like, that's really all he can do.

Did he like it? Hell no. But is he just supposed to say that to Ranboo? Is he supposed to say that red is one of his favorite colors but it looked so foreign and out of place dripping out of his foster brother's arm?

What does Ranboo want from him?

Tommy doesn't say any of that.

"Y'know," he says calmly, actually thinking through his thoughts for once. "You should talk to Wil more."

"Oh?" Ranboo says, giving him a look. A look that means something. Tommy knows what it conveys. He gives the same look back.

"Yeah," Tommy says. "Talk to Wil."

Maybe Wil can say the things to Ranboo that'll actually help instead of the bullshit floating around Tommy's head. Wil's been through this, he's sure to have much better advice.

Ranboo dismisses himself a little later, and Tommy can't help but feel relief.

He doesn't know much about addiction, he doesn't know much about self harm, but he knows both can lead to a shit ton of complications. But Phil knows, and Ranboo's trying to stop.

Baby steps, he tells himself, baby steps. After all, he did the same thing when he first got here. Well maybe not physically hurting himself, but he self sabotaged like no other and he turned out okay.

If there's any place where things turn out alright, it's here.

There's that at least.

Chapter End Notes

CW End Notes Summary

Throwing Up: tommy wakes up early to the sound of wil throwing up. he finds him in

the bathroom and then wakes phil. phil has him fetch water. tommy makes sure wil is okay and wil encourages him to go back to bed

Self Harm: tommy finds ranboo cutting himself. he fetches phil and retreats. later ranboo and tommy discuss the self harm. ranboo explains its an addiction that hes working on recovering from, but his dissociation makes it hard at times. tommy is understanding, but doesnt really know what to say. he advises ranboo talks to wil, as wil has personal experience and better advice.

-

also for people who asked about my cat shes doing much better ty

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encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

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running in circles

Chapter Summary

Tubbo and Ranboo have a fake baby now. Tommy's totally not jealous. At all. Also, something's up with Ranboo.

Chapter Notes

CW: jealousy, shame, joking mention of killing, repression, parent snapping at child, yelling/arguing, fear of abandonment, general shittiness of the foster system, mentions of memory loss/issues, stress, brief mention of self harm

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"What the fuck is that thing?" Tommy asks as Ranboo takes the seat across from him on the bus."

"What? Oh, this?" Ranboo asks, waving at the baby carrier he carries as if it's not completely out of place and there's something else that Tommy's talking about.

"Yeah that," Tommy says, deadpan.

"This is Michael!" Ranboo introduces. And then he reaches into the carrier and ever so gently pulls out a baby. What the fuck.

It's head turns slightly and Tommy jumps back. It's beady eyes stare at him, before softly closing as Ranboo tilts him slightly.

It's then Tommy realizes that the baby isn't real. It turns when Ranboo moves and it's eyes open and close with gravity. It's plastic and has realistic rolls of baby fat that unrealistically stay stock still. Its diaper is a poor imitation and the pacifier Ranboo sticks onto the front is a magnet.

"Demon baby," Tommy says, absolutely horrified.

"Hey!" Ranboo protests, "don't talk to my son that way," he protests.

"Your son?"

"Yeah, we and Tubbo are doing a project together. We have to take care of a baby for health. We named him michael."

"I know," Tommy says, because he's heard this before, "you told me a few days ago.

Ranboo frowns.

"Oh. I did?"

Tommy nods.

"Huh. Well uh, this is him."

And as if the robot baby knew that it was being talked about, it broke into mechanical sobbing noises as it began to screech.

"Oh shoot!" Ranboo says, pulling the baby away from Tommy's inspection and bringing it close as he stares down at the thing.

"Jesus!" Tommy yelps, scrambling away from it. He waits for Ranboo to shut the noise off, but seconds later he's still staring at the thing.

"Turn it off!" Tommy insists. Other kids have started to look at them, turning to inspect the small screaming demon plastic ball with varying expressions of interest, amusement, and annoyance.

"It's a baby, I can't just turn it off," Ranboo explains.

"It's a hunk of plastic with a voice box," Tommy bites back. "Doesn't it have a way you can make it stop crying?"

"Kind of, I think?" Ranboo says, "Here take him for a minute." Ranboo shoves the child towards Tommy before letting go and turning to his backpack.

It's at that exact moment that Tommy pales and says, "what?" before jerking away.

Which means the baby falls to the floor. Its back and head hits it and it starts to scream even louder.

"Tommy!" Ranboo scolds, "His neck could have broken."

He scrambles to pick up the baby, holding it protectively and away from Tommy.

A wave of something washes over Tommy and his stomach feels heavy. It's not even fucking real, it's just a dumb toy. But even so, Tommy feels bad.

Ranboo just gave him an imitation baby and Tommy had dropped it. He had dropped it on its head. God that was- that was pretty bad, huh? And now Ranboo had to hold the baby in one hand- still screaming- while he searched through his backpack, looking for the notes.

He pulls them out awkwardly, not having enough hands to hold the baby securely as well as his notes. Some of them spill onto the floor of the bus. Tommy's heart sinks some more.

"I uh- can help," Tommy offers.

Ranboo side eyes him, and frowns.

"No it's okay," he insists, "I got it."

He doesn't have it, which is fairly obvious with his papers spilling all over the place, but Tommy really knows it's Ranboo being too nice to say that he's not trusting him with Michael again.

Did Tommy really drop him? How could he do that? What an idiot.

Fuck Michael. He's stupid anyways. And he won't stop screaming. Tommy turns away with a huff, leaving Ranboo to struggle as he stares out the window on the bus.

But for some reason Ranboo and Tubbo actually seem to care about the thing.

Really, Tommy shouldn't have been surprised but it's still weird seeing his friend and foster sibling care about the thing.

"I don't get it, why do you care about it?" Tommy asks, laying back on the couch in Tubbo's room as Tubbo holds a tiny fake bottle to the things mouth. It clicks on with a magnet.

"He's my son," Tubbo professes, staring deeply into the still beady eyes of the baby mannequin.

"It's a lump of plastic," Tommy protests again.

Tubbo frowns, "I don't get why you care that much. You seem to want me to hate it."

"It's just weird," Tommy insists, "You and Ranboo are all over the stupid thing and you like-cherish the fucking thing and won't even let me near it."

So maybe he's still a little bit bitter about that whole ordeal.

"Tommy we don't let him near him because you dropped him," Tubbo reminds, and god why did he have to bring it up.

"I know," Tommy says, and jeez what's with that voice crack? "Okay, Tubbo, I know. I know I dropped him and he could have broken his neck and I'm like- a terrible person for almost killing your kid and-"

"Woah woah woah," Tubbo says, setting Michael to the side to look at Tommy. "Tommy, you dropped a plastic baby doll, you didn't kill the queen or something."

"I know," Tommy says with a sniffle. He's sniffling? Why is he so close to tears? He's almost an adult and he's a fucking Big Man why is he crying over this?

Tubbo gives a soft smile.

“Tommy, it’s okay,” Tubbo soothes.

Tommy rolls his eyes. He’s being a big baby over nothing. He says as much.

“You’re not a big baby,” Tubbo snorts, “It’s just- brain shit being weird, yeah?”

Tommy shrugs, and sighs.

“It’s just like- what if that was a real kid or something.”

“But it wasn’t.”

“But what if it was?”

“But it wasn’t.”

Tommy huffs.

“Here,” Tubbo says. And he picks up Michael, grabs Tommy’s arms, and drops the thing right into him.

Tommy stares up at him with wide eyes. Tubbo snorts at his expression.

“See, you’re doing fine.”

Tommy looks down at the plastic doll, a mixture of emotion rising within him. Tubbo’s making this so simple, like it’s not a big deal at all. But he doesn’t understand, he doesn’t understand that Tommy has to be good at this, has to have Tubbo trust him because Ranboo and him are already getting so close and if things continue at this rate... Well then what’ll happen to Tommy?

“Is this actually about a stupid school project?” Tubbo asks, taking back the doll, and abandoning it somewhere behind him.

Tommy looks down, blush appearing across his cheeks slowly.

“I just-” he tries.

“Y’know, I know you’re jealous,” Tubbo says.

Tommy whips his head up.

“What. Jealous?”

“Yeah, ‘bout me and Ranboo.”

“I’m not jealous,” Tommy protests.

Tubbo raises an eyebrow.

"I'm not," Tommy says firmly. Which... okay that might not be the entire truth. But Tubbo doesn't need to know that!

Tubbo's face softens.

"You're my best friend Tommy," Tubbo says.

"I know," Tommy huffs, "obviously."

"And that's not going to change."

Tommy knows that, okay. Him and Tubbo are best friends. They spend every day together, text each other during classes and stay up way too late watching youtube videos. They trust each other to the core, Tubbo coming to him about his stress to live up to his sibling's shadow and Tommy with his insecurities within his family. They talk about school stress, and study together. Tubbo knows where the extra blankets are kept in Tommy's house's side closet. And Tommy knows where the silverware goes in Tubo's dishwasher.

Tubbo and Tommy's friendship survived through the trauma of Tommy taking Wilbur's meds and then telling Tubbo and refusing to tell anyone else. It survived Tubbo telling Phil what was happening and they mended and came back together.

Ranboo certainly isn't going to break that.

Right?

"Look, Tommy," Tubbo says, making sure to face him, completely open. "I like Ranboo. He's a cool dude. I'm friends with him. But I can have more than one friend."

"I know," Tommy sighs.

"But you're still jealous," Tubbo points out.

Tommy wants to refute the fact, but can't. It's so stupid, but he can't. He is jealous and he shouldn't feel that way. He has no reason to be jealous, and yet he is anyway.

Does that make him a bad person?

"Yeah," he admits, "yeah I am."

"Okay," Tubbo says, "and that's why I'm going to be right here, reminding you that you're my friend. And when you're ready to tackle this jealousy stuff, I'm here, okay?"

Tommy gives a small nod.

"Plus, Ranboo's really not that bad," Tubbo encourages.

And speaking of Ranboo...

"Tommy?" Phil asks, knocking on his door.

"Yeah? Come in," Tommy responds, turning around in his chair and pausing his game to see what his dad needs.

Phil opens the door and pokes his head through.

"Have you seen Ranboo?" he asks.

"No?" Tommy asks, "why."

"I can't find him, and he didn't say anything about leaving the house. He didn't pick up his phone as well."

Well that is... odd. Ranboo's kind of the model child all things considered. It's weird for him to not report to Phil on what he's doing and even weirder for him not to pick up his phone.

"Can you try calling him?" Phil asks.

"Sure," Tommy says, and grabs his phone off his desk.

He opens it and goes to his contacts, heading to favorites and tapping on Ranboo. Seconds later, the phone starts to ring.

He waits for it, letting it go once, twice, and slowly all the way through until it lands on voicemail.

Phil frowns and pulls out his own phone. He punches a few things in and brings it up to his ear.

Not long after, he lowers the phone, defeated.

"He's not picking up," Tommy says, stating the obvious.

"Maybe his phone's dead," Phil offers.

"But it rang."

"Right."

Phil hovers in the door for a moment, Tommy awkwardly turned in his seat. They look at one another for a moment, wondering what this means.

"Alright, I'll leave you alone," Phil says, "let me know if you hear from him, yeah?"

"Okay," Tommy answers, and tries not to let his racing thoughts get the best of him. Where is Ranboo? Why isn't he picking up? Did something happen? Why didn't he tell anyone where he was going?

Phil gives a weak smile, and shuts the door on the way out.

Tommy sighs, turns back around and presses play on his game. Time to see what Tom Nook needs this time. Capitalist bastard.

He plays for another hour or so, mind slipping away with the passage of time. He gets so focused on his game, hyperfixating away on the little animal villagers and the abundance of tasks he has to do that he almost misses his phone ringing.

But he catches it on the third ring, and glances over. It's an unfamiliar number, unsaved, and so he chooses to ignore it.

It goes to voicemail and not a minute later his phone is ringing again. This time it isn't a random number, but Ranboo.

Tommy scrambles to pick it up.

"Ranboo?" Tommy says, "dude where the hell have you been? I think Phil's gonna call in the troops man."

"Is this Tommy?" An unfamiliar and undeniably feminine voice asks.

"Who is this?" Tommy demands.

"Right, sorry," she says, "I'm Niki. Ranboo's sister."

"Uh what," Tommy says, "you're who? I didn't know Ranboo had a sister."

Didn't Phil say Ranboo was an only child? He remembers that, right? Ranboo doesn't have a sister, can't have a sister.

"He does," she confirms.

And okay, wait what. Tommy feels like he would have known if Ranboo had a sister. And wait, what's going on?

"Why do you have Ranboo's phone?"

"He's with me-"

"He's with you!"

He's with his sister? Holy shit. Maybe Ranboo isn't as well adjusted as he thought.

"Yes, do you think you can get Phil? The line was busy?"

"Phil?" Tommy asks. Who is this person? What's going on?

"Tommy, please," Niki insists.

"Uhhhh," Tommy stutters, and then he hears a voice in the background, Ranboo's voice. He can't make out the words but Ranboo's obviously saying something to Niki. Niki turns to scold him, but it doesn't sound mean, merely caring but berating. Can those coexist? Tommy doesn't even know.

What was- oh right, Phil!

"Uh sure, just a second." He gets up, leaving his room to go to Phil's, but he doesn't get an answer. He hops down the stairs instead. But Phil isn't in the living room or kitchen.

This is when Tommy hears a voice down the hall, he follows it to Ranboo's room, and sitting inside of it on Ranboo's bed is Phil himself.

Tommy hovers at the door.

"Dad," Tommy calls, even though his dad is on the phone, "uh. Niki called me. Ranboo's sister. He's with her I guess?"

"Ranboo's sister?" Phil asks, seemingly just as baffled.

Tommy nods and holds out his phone.

"Amelia, I'll call you back," Phil says, and then hangs up as he takes the new phone from Tommy.

"Hello," he says, "This is Phil."

Tommy hovers. Maybe he shouldn't, but Phil's face is tense and Tommy's never heard of Ranboo's sister.

So sue him- maybe he's worried about the kid! Maybe this person's lying and she isn't actually Ranboo's sister and kidnapped him.

But then why would she call?

So he hovers.

Phil exchanges tense, short conversation with the person on the other line and a few minutes later he's hanging up.

"What's going on?" Tommy asks the minute he does.

"I have to go pick up Ranboo," Phil says, pushing towards the door.

"Is he okay?" Tommy asks, trailing after him, "was that really his sister?"

"Yes. And yes it was," Phil says, not bothering to turn as he heads to the kitchen to grab his keys.

"Why's he with her? I didn't even know he had a sister? Where is he?" Tommy pesters, curious as always and very very lost.

"Tommy," Phil snaps, "not now."

Tommy's heart instantly drops. His voice dries up, mouth empty and cold. He gulps, and is barely able to do that. He takes a stumbling step back and shuts up.

Of course. He's being annoying, pestering Phil when he has important things to take care of.

Phil stills, takes a breath, and pauses.

He turns and looks at Tommy.

"I'm sorry," he instantly apologizes, "I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm stressed right now, and it wasn't fair of me to take that out on you"

Tommy nods meekly.

"All your questions are valid," Phil tells him, "It's really sweet of you to be so concerned about Ranboo. I need to get going right now, but I promise I'll explain everything I can to you when I get back, alright?"

Tommy nods again, still quiet.

"You're not annoying," Phil says, and why does he always have to hit that mark? Phil pulls him close and Tommy tightens the loose embrace into a crushing hug. "You're asking good questions. I was in the wrong for snapping at you."

"Promise?" Tommy asks.

"Promise," Phil repeats.

Okay. That's okay then.

"I love you," Phil says.

"Love you too. Now go get Ranboo."

Phil nods, squeezes him one last time, and leaves to get Ranboo from wherever he's ended up.

Needless to say, dinner that night is an awkward affair, as well as much quieter than usual.

Phil told Tommy he'd share what he could but Tommy doesn't really know how much that is. And it sorta feels wrong to bring it up at dinner and stuff when Ranboo's right there and looking sullen.

"I want to go back to Niki's," he says abruptly, a quarter of the way through the meal.

"I know," Phil says. It's gentle, non-judgemental. "And I'm sorry I can't let you do that."

Tommy feels like he's missing something.

"Your sister?" He confirms, fishing for information. Afterall, Ranboo brought it up so it's fair game, right?

Ranboo scowls.

"You told him?" He demands, glaring at Phil.

"Niki called him," Phil says gently.

"Oh." Ranboo looks down at his plate, pushing his food around. "I want to go back."

"I know."

"Then let me!" Ranboo shouts. He stands at the table, throwing his hands down and letting his fists bang against the table. The silverware clatters and Tommy jumps in his seat. Tommy's surprised to see even Phil startle slightly at his side "Let me go back!" He demands, "let me go home!"

He speaks passionately, from the heart, and Tommy isn't surprised to find tears in his eyes.

"Ranboo, I wish I could," Phil tells him, "I promise- tomorrow morning my first call is going to go to Amelia, we're going to get this sorted out, alright?"

Ranboo's tears only increase, creating steady trails down his cheeks that he rubs desperately away with his hands.

He pushes away from the table, abandoning his plate and leaving for his room, storming down the hall. Tommy hears the door slam behind him.

Tommy's heart races.

"You're sending him back?" Tommy demands. "You're getting rid of him?"

Tommy didn't think Phil was capable of doing something like that. After all Tommy had worked his ass off to get kicked out and it hadn't worked. What had Ranboo done to break that system in seconds. Could- could Tommy do the same thing?

Would Phil send him back?

"No," Phil says gently, "no, it's not like that. It's-"

Tommy waits, but Phil doesn't continue.

"Not like what?" Tommy demands, "I thought you said you'd never send one of us back."

Phil melts.

"Of course- Tommy of course not. No, never. This is different. Ranboo- Ranboo doesn't want to be here."

"I didn't want to be here," Tommy points out. Because we'll, he hadn't. Everything had seemed too good to be true and everyone was too nice. It seemed fake and Tommy was scared and there was nothing he wanted more than to be kicked out.

Or well, there was something he wanted more. One thing he knew he'd never get.

He looks up at him, the crows feet by his eyes and the tiny braid in his hair that he had let Tommy do the other day.

Guess he got the impossible in the end, huh?

"Ranboo's situation is different," Phil says, "I don't- I don't want to cross his boundaries and share things he isn't okay with. But it's not what you're thinking, okay? Do you trust me?"

He didn't, a short time ago. But now... now Tommy does trust him.

He gives a tiny nod.

"Okay. Then trust me. Ranboo's not getting kicked out."

Tommy nods. Dinner is finished in silence.

And... and he does trust Phil, okay? But uh, years of habit are hard to reduce completely and he's still a bit worried about Ranboo- not that he's ever admit it- so maybe, maybe he sneaks down to the other room later.

It's not like he has to sneak around the house, but something has him creeping out of his door slowly, checking Phil's, and then quietly racing down the stairs.

He knocks on the door and gets a sullen, "come in."

Tommy opens the door slowly, hinges creaking with effort.

Ranboo spares him a glance when he enters and Tommy immediately winces at the sight of him. His face is completely red.

"Dude, what- are you okay?"

Ranboo frowns at him, titling his head.

"Your face," Tommy exclaims.

"Oh," Ranboo says, "oh yeah. I'm fine. Allergic to water, remember?"

"Jesus," Tommy says. The dude has fucking hives on his face. That looks like it would hurt.

Ranboo shrugs again, and looks down.

"Can't you take anything?" Tommy asks.

"Already did. And it's- I mean it's not that bad. The hives usually go away in like two hours max."

"Dude you have hives on your face. That sucks," Tommy insists. He's gotten hives all of one time- an allergic reaction to some type of medicine- and he had been miserable, but at least those had stuck to his arm and part of his chest. He can't imagine that on his face.

Ranboo looks at him.

"Yeah," he admits, voice cracking. "Yeah it does kinda suck," he admits.

With that, he bursts into a new wave of tears. Tommy stumbles into motion, moving closer and hovering even as he's not sure what to do.

Ranboo wipes his eyes as the tears fall- presumably to hide them, or maybe to keep them off his face- and Tommy notices that his hands have smaller hives as well. Jesus. He's a fucking mess.

Tommy looks around his room, finds a kleenex and grabs one before pressing it into Ranboo's hands.

Ranboo stares at him for a minute, teardrops dripping down his face, before he gently takes the offering and uses it to wipe away his tears.

Tommy takes a step back, and waits. He doesn't want to interfere.

Ranboo cries himself out soon enough, and minutes later the two of them are sitting on his bed in silence.

"So," Tommy starts, not quite sure where to begin. "Does this have to do with Niki?"

Ranboo nods as he takes a shuddering breath.

"Niki is my sister," he explains, "We were- we got separated when she aged out of the system. She's 22 now. And she- she worked really hard, got a job and she filed all the papers- and she was supposed to- she's supposed to have gotten custody of me," Ranboo explains.

Oh. Oh shit.

"She did everything right," Ranboo insists, "She did. But they won't let her take me because all my paperworks messed up and I have a bunch of medical issues and they think she won't be able to handle it but- but she can! She can! She was better than any of our foster parents at making sure I took my meds and helped me remember stuff and she always carried stuff on her when I got hives and would check in on me when I forgot stuff and never got mad at me."

Ranboo's breath hitches once more, and Tommy's worried there's going to be more tears.

"She did everything right," Ranboo insists, "she did. And I'm supposed to be with her. She's the only family I have left. But I'm not with her. I'm here."

"Jesus fuck," Tommy whispers. He falls back onto Ranboo's bed, staring up at the ceiling, "the foster system sucks."

Ranboo nods miserably. He joins Tommy, falling back against his bed as well.

"Well uh," Tommy starts after a moment, "y'know, if what you saids true- 'bout Niki- Phil's gonna help you, you know," Tommy insists.

Ranboo gives him a look. Tommy's going to name it the 'you're lying so bad that it's not even fucking funny who taught you how to act look'. He might need to shorten it. It's a little long.

"I'm serious," Tommy says, "Phil's good people. Actually. I didn't believe it either. But if- like if Niki can actually, genuinely take care of you- and it's the best thing for both of you- Phil'll make it happen. Either that, or he'll die trying. Man's not one to give up."

Ranboo looks at him and then blinks. His face is still extremely red, covered in a patchwork of hives and swelling. He looks absolutely miserable. Tommy hates to see him looking like this.

"I really hope you're right," Ranboo whispers, and it's almost too quiet for Tommy to hear.

And Tommy is right. Before he knows it there's an energy in the house, a drive. When Phil's not working Tommy finds him speaking to Ranboo's social worker- Tommy still has a fond spot for Amelia- as well as Niki.

Sometimes Phil will be on the calls in the kitchen, or the living room, or the hallway and Tommy will catch sight of him and see the sheer determination in him that Tommy knows everything will work out.

But again there's that issue of things will be okay. But they aren't. Not yet. And it seems that they're destined to suffer in the meantime.

Tommy pretends not to notice how Ranboo's arms have new scrapes or how his therapy appointments increase from weekly to twice weekly. Ranboo starts sticking to his room more, and talks to all of them less, and there's an edge to everything he does.

Tommy knows Ranboo's struggling, knows he's hurting. He does his best to give Ranboo the space he needs to do that.

It's just- well it's a little hard being in the same environment as somehow who's struggling. Phil always seems stressed with a pile of paperwork and Ranboo always seems sad with a distinct frown and something deep burning in his eyes.

Tommy's doing his best, but it all kinda sucks because this isn't something he can help with. He can't make this better. So he's just caught in between a spiraling mess of stress that builds and builds and builds.

Chapter End Notes

I have been waiting for this moment for so long. Would really love to hear y'all's thoughts on this one.

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the walls closing in

Chapter Summary

Tommy is... Tommy's fucking stressed. Really fucking stressed. Where does he go from here?

Chapter Notes

CW: extreme stress, ableism, discussion of ideals of a 'proper household', discussion of the idea of the promotion of celibacy, disconnection, self harm (mentioned), tics (action), tics (description of feeling), small breakdown

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Home becomes busier than it has in months, and it's starting to get on Tommy's nerves. There's so much action and noise. Since the whole 'Ranboo has a sister thing' happened, the house has been extremely busy. Paperwork is across billions of different surfaces and Phil spends the majority of his time on the phone.

It's a good thing, it means they're figuring out Ranboo's stuff and hopefully getting him what he needs, what's best to him.

But it doesn't make the home environment any less loud, any less stressful.

Tommy's frazzled just being here and a big part of him feels guilty admitting that.

"Wow," Tubbo says, "you weren't kidding about the paperwork."

He stares at one large stack on the kitchen counter.

"No," Tommy sighs, "no I wasn't." He grabs two glasses from the cupboard, pouring out water for him and Tubbo. Ranboo's at therapy, so he isn't around.

That's another thing that's started with all of this going on, Ranboo heading to therapy more frequently. He's been going practically since he moved in with them, but now he's going twice a week instead of once.

It's good he's getting the help he needs.

Phil's on the phone upstairs, having picked them all up, dropped Ranboo off, and headed straight up to make a call.

He must have forgotten to close his door, because Tommy can still hear bits of his conversation and it's enough to pull him away from Tubbo's next words.

But then he catches sight of Tubbo's expectant gaze and blinks quickly, shaking his head.

"Sorry, Phil's call was distracting me."

Tubbo frowns, "huh?"

Tommy nods towards the stairs and deposits one of the glasses of water in front of Tommy.

"All the call stuff," Tommy says, "the noise just distracted me."

"You can hear Phil on a call from here?" Tubbo asks.

"Yeah. He probably left his door open. Wait, can you like- not hear that?"

Tubbo shakes his head.

Tommy laughs lightly.

"Uh yeah, probably an ADHD thing," he admits, "sensory stuff, y'know? I can also hear like, the buzzing of fluorescents and shit like that. Lots of background noise. Shit's annoying."

"Oh okay," Tubbo says. He pauses for a second, "want to play Mario Kart?"

"Yes," Tommy agrees immediately, abandoning their spots in the kitchen for the living room.

He's hoping all of this will be over soon. Hopefully this'll get sorted and things will get worked out and the papers on the kitchen table will be gone and Tommy won't be distracted by Phil being so busy he forgot to close the door on his phone call.

Tommy preferred the house when it was calm. He does his best to search for calmer moments, calmer spaces in the chaos. He's only partially successful.

One thing that is always calming is his weekly calls with Techno. He still has those.

"How's the garden?" Techno asks, like he always does.

"The potatoes miss you," Tommy says.

"The potatoes don't have feelings, Tommy," Techno says, deadpan.

"They miss you Techno."

"Mmm, sure they do. Think you're projecting a bit?"

"I could never miss you, bitch," Tommy says without missing a beat.

"Of course. Same here."

They're both fucking liars, and they know it. But they aren't about to say it.

"Tubbo and Ranboo adopted a child."

"Oh do they gotta do that health project?"

Tommy frowns. He'd been hoping to make Techno confused and shocked, but he already knows about it.

"Yeah," he admits, "named the thing Michael."

"You get extra credit points if you name it I think," Techno says, "I don't remember, I weasled my way out of that project, wasn't about to take hoim a crying plastic doll."

Tommy frowns, "How'd you do that?"

"I wrote a paper about how teaching high schoolers to raise a baby in pairs places expectations for everyone to one day have a child without necessarily having the desire for one and how this often leads to unhappy parents, abandoned children, higher divorce rates, and increase in mental health problems. Therefore, it was unreasonable to expect anyone who didn't desire to have a child one day to participate in the project."

"You're kidding me," Tommy says.

"Nope. Not to mention- uh wait. Is it okay if I infodump?"

"go for it," Tommy says with a smile. listening to Techno infodump is one of his favorite things.

"Well I was saying that of course everything I stayed before is true but the situation is compounded by the fact that the assignment is also mostly used to promote celibacy and discourage teen pregnancy through scare tactics. Historically, scare tactics don't work and cause issues within the next generation instead of solving the original problem.

"The growth assignment leaves out major importances of caring for a child- the largest being consent- as well as specifically designing it to be an irritating and annoying project instead of a beneficial, meaningful tool. It gives nothing in the terms of success with a child- no joy- no watching them experience the world and watching them reach milestones.

"I'm addition I brought up how autistic people are largely discouraged from being parents, even being operated on to make us infertile. Or taking our children away for no other reason besides our diagnosis. Which of course is ableist bullshit. But if this class is teaching how to fit society's picture perfect family, then it actually made the most sense that I didn't participate as having a child of my own is so heavily pushed against. The project also promotes the idea that dual parenthood is the only viable option, ignoring the fact that single parents exist in addition to polyamorous parents, and a variety of other family systems that can be just as successful.

"My teacher must have agreed with one of those reasons, because he let me drop the project. Or maybe I only got away with it because it was a twelve page report."

“Twelve fucking pages?” God Tommy can’t imagine even writing one. He’s so glad he’s not in health.

Though it makes sense, Tommy guesses Techno has always been fond of writing. Probably why he became an English major.

“I’ve started thinking about uni,” Tommy admits.

“Oh?” Techno says.

“Yeah,” Tommy admits, “Think I want to do shit with editing and videography and stuff.”

“That’s cool,” Techno says.

“Yeah?” Tommy asks, little sparkles of joy bursting through him at even the smallest validation.

“Yeah, I think you’d be really good at that,” Techno admits, “I remember the slideshow video you put together for dad on his birthday.”

Tommy blushes, it had been a cheesy silly thing for Phil’s first birthday with Tommy as his legal adopted child. He’s a bit embarrassed about it now really. But the praise warms his heart.

“Thanks Big T,” he says.

“Anywhere you’ve started looking at in particular?” Techno asks.

“No,” Tommy admits, “I dunno where to really start. Only place I looked at was your uni, actually, cause it was the only one I really knew.”

“Yeah I don’t know much about our video and editing programs here, they’re-”

“They’re good,” Tommy blurts out, “I dunno how great. I don’t think they’re the best. But they look pretty good.”

“Yeah?” Techno asks, “Well maybe you can visit me or something, check out campus.”

“Really?” Tommy asks.

“Sure, why not. Might be nice to get away for a bit, things are a bit crazy at home right now anyway.”

Tommy thinks about the last two weeks. He wonders how Techno knows. Phil probably told him. And Techno gets how overwhelming all this stuff can be for Tommy. Techno gets it because he’s that way too, gets overwhelmed in the same ways. It’s a nice piece of validation.

“Yeah,” he agrees, “Yeah, just a little bit.”

"Okay, I'll talk to Dad then," Techno says, "bet you can come out for a long weekend or something, You have one of those coming up, yeah?"

"Uh, yeah, yeah," Tommy confirms, switching the phone to his other ear.

"Alright, sounds like a plan."

Tommy smiles into the phone.

"So what else has been up with you?" Techno asks.

Tommy shrugs and begins to ramble about his week. It's been fine for the most part. Just.... Stressful. Ranboo's still pretty sensitive and Phil's so busy it's... Tommy gets it. He isn't mad and he hopes this all goes well and gets figured out. But the house is a tad stressful and confusing at the moment.

The rest of the call is steady, normal, and he doesn't find himself lingering on parts of it. In fact, he's forgotten most of the finer details until Phil brings it up one afternoon when he drives him home from therapy.

"Do you want to visit Techno for the three day weekend?" Phil asks.

"Yes," Tommy responds immediately. He flaps his hands a little at even the idea.

Phil offers him a smile.

"Cool. We'll book you a flight."

And that's that. He leaves in three weeks for the upcoming long weekend to visit Techno all the way out in California.

It has Tommy in a significantly better mood. It'll be nice to get out of the house for a bit. Tommy knows Phil feels bad, feels like he's making home stressful with everything he's bringing home, but Tommy really doesn't blame him.

Yeah home has been a bit more stressful with the paperwork, the appointments, the house inspections, and the phone calls. But these things mean that Ranboo gets to go home. To his proper home. So Tommy's willing to bare with it.

But while Tommy's doing a bit better with the announcement, Ranboo is considerably not.

Tommy finds him on the living room couch, staring a hole into the carpet.

"Uh, you good?" Tommy asks him.

Ranboo says nothing in response.

Tommy approaches him carefully, worried that he'll startle him but wanting to make sure Ranboo's okay.

Ranboo's usually jumpy, but he makes no move or response to Tommy.

Tommy carefully sits next to him.

"Ranboo?" he asks.

Ranboo blinks, and continues to stare at the floor. Tommy notices how his hands clutch at his opposite wrists, allowing his nails to dig firmly into his forearms.

"Uh, you're hurting yourself," Tommy mentions. Ranboo still doesn't respond, and Tommy starts to get a deep sinking feeling in his chest.

There's a small noise behind him, and Tommy sees Phil coming down the stairs.

They catch each other's gaze and Phil gives him a smile.

"Tommy, Ranboo," he greets, "What are you two up to?"

Tommy stutters for a response and Phil's eyebrows crease. He hops down the last few stairs and comes over to Tommy. He puts a hand on his shoulder and leans over.

"You alright mate?" he asks gently.

"Uh- I- Ranboo," Tommy says, gesturing in his foster brother's direction. Phil's frown deepens as he turns to the other boy, studying him for a moment.

"Ranboo?" he prompts gently.

Like Tommy, he gets no response.

Phil rounds the couch and crouches in front of him.

"Ranboo can you hear me?" he asks.

Ranboo stays in the same position.

Tommy's ears ring and goosebumps appear on his arms. It's weird to see Ranboo this still.

"Can you give us some space?" Phil asks gently.

Tommy swallows harshly.

"Sure," he chokes out, and flees. Is it bad to say he's glad to be dismissed?

He feels bad, but Ranboo being that still kind of freaked him out and he's glad to disappear to his room. Plus, only a little while longer until he gets to visit Techno.

He tells Tubbo about the news one day when they're hanging out after school. Ranboo's out with Phil at the psychiatrist so it's just him and Tubbo home right now. They relax in Tommy's room, playing games and giggling like idiots. It's the least stressed Tommy's felt for a long time.

Then Tommy starts to feel this itch.

Michael the plastic baby starts to cry.

They both turn to stare at the child in the carrier in the corner.

Tommy wants to say- but that doesn't make sense.

The itch builds.

"Have you seen Michael's bottle?" Tubbo asks with a sigh looking around the carrier.

Tommy shakes his head, and the weird pressure inside of him continues. He doesn't know what it is, all he knows is that if he goes to say something he'll...

"Tommy?" Tubbo asks, still turned from him and looking on the carpet.

"No," Tommy hisses out around the itch, barely able to get the word out.

"Okay," Tubbo says. He turns to his bag, digging through it.

"Ah there it-"

"Pog," Tommy blurts out suddenly, the pressure getting too much to hold back. He doesn't mean to say it, doesn't want to even. He just does. He had to.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, not noticing anything unusual. The word makes enough sense in context.
"Got it."

Tubbo's begins to feed the screeching lump of plastic and after a few minutes it's wails return to silence and a few coos.

"Jeez that thing has a set of lungs," Tommy says, "why do they make them so loud?"

He's still a little unnerved by the strange pressure and utterance from moments ago, but the feeling has faded so he pushes it aside.

"Right?" Tubbo says, "I think someone who's deaf would be able to hear this thing, it's so loud."

Tommy chuckles.

"You know Techno got out of that assignment by writing an essay?"

"He did? Tubbo asks.

"Mhmm," and Tommy begins to recount the story that had been recently told to him. He can't wait to visit Techno.

He starts counting down the days.

And so that's how he finds himself standing outside of Techno's front room only a few weeks later. Not even thirty minutes ago Techno had picked him up from the airport, and since he had borrowed a friend's car, it hadn't been a long ride back to where he lives.

"I call your bed," Tommy says, the second he sets his foot in Techno's dorm. He would move in that direction to claim it, but he's never actually been in Techno's dorm and therefore doesn't actually know where his room or bed is.

"No," Techno says immediately, "you get the couch. Or take Dream's bed for all I care."

A jingling noise sounds from inside and Tommy looks in its direction, eyes slowly falling to the small fluffy dog. The thing races towards him and jumps excitedly at his feet.

Tommy instantly falls to his knees, hands petting the dog instantly.

"Oh my gosh, Floof is adorable," he tells Techno, before speaking directly to the dog, "You're a cutie, aren't you." Floof gives him tongue kisses and wriggles beneath his hands, soaking up the attention.

Techno grunts.

"Stupid dog. Too cute for 'is own good."

Tommy looks up just in time to catch the small smile on his face. After a moment more of loving the animal, he stands.

"So..." he asks with his duffle in hand, "Where can I put my bag?"

Techno stares at him for a moment before turning and taking the door on the left.

It's a decent sized dorm, with a living room and kitchen. There's only one main room and no hall, but there's two separate rooms with one bed each and a bathroom in the dorm as well. Certainly one of the nicer dorms out there.

Techno twists the door open, shoving it open and grabbing Tommy's bag from him. Tommy follows and watches as Techno drops the bag at the base of his bed. It has the same sheets Techno has at home. He's always been one for consistency. Something about it makes him smile.

The rest of Techno's room is mostly covered in books and dog items. There's a dog bed in the corner and a mix of Neil Gaiman, Philip Pullman, Mary Shelley, and Victor Hugo against his window sill.

The other notable thing about his room is the pictures. There aren't many, but the few that exist stand out. There's a couple tacked up onto a bulletin board; Wilbur and Techno smiling at the beach, sometime before Tommy got there and Techno was still going through his growth spurt. There's another of a much younger Techno curled up on Phil's lap, sound asleep. Tommy has no idea how it was taken. And then there's one where Techno's standing, looking much like he does now, with Tommy thrown over his shoulder. Tommy's almost falling off, banging his fists on his back as Techno casually looks at something off camera.

The weird thing is that Tommy doesn't even recognize when it was taken. It's just one of countless memories he has with Techno.

The last photo isn't on the bulletin board, instead framed and next to Techno's bed.

It's Techno on his graduation day. His headphones are on, under the graduation cap. The cap is half falling in his eyes, blocking most of his vision. Wilbur's throwing up bunny ears on his head and Tommy's using his superior height to slump down on one of his shoulders. Phil stands next to them, an exasperated smile with a hand to his forehead. Techno's the only one actually looking at the camera, though you can barely tell with how much his eyes are covered. What can't be mistaken, is the large familiar scowl that spreads across the majority of his face.

And just like that, Tommy bursts into tears.

There's a minute of nothingness, a few seconds of plain void where Tommy's crying and Techno's standing, almost like time has paused. Then suddenly, it all comes crashing down.

Tommy wails.

He wails in that way where something is so distinctively wrong. He wails in the way that has everyone looking, that has people wondering what awful news a person could have received. Tommy wails, and he falls.

He can't do this anymore

"Heh?" Techno says, at his side. Which is fair, in all honesty, Tommy did just burst into tears at a couple of photos. Techno has no way of knowing- no way of understanding- why he does.

"Sorry," he says hastily. He sniffles, snot slowly leaking from his nose as tears continue to fall from his eyes in a steady stream. He chokes on a sob.

"Uhhh," Techno says, and then he leaves the room, letting the door click behind him.

Tommy is left alone.

Tommy works on taking a deep breath, failing as his breath catches on another sob, and he leans against Techno's bed, pressing his hands into his eyes.

He stays like that for a moment, gently and painfully crying until Techno reenters the room.

He walks over to his bed, setting something down, and then to Tommy, making sure their gazes don't meet before extending his hand. Tommy reaches out hesitantly, not sure what he's getting into.

Techno hops onto his bed, slowly pulling Tommy with him and then pulling him close.

His tears slow as he tries to comprehend and understand what's happening. Techno releases for a moment and turns behind him, grabbing what he had set down moments before.

His weighted blanket, Tommy realizes.

He raises it, pulling it around him and Tommy and then holding Tommy close, arms wrapping around him in just the right way to provide pressure evenly. Tommy's sobs turn to small gasps and his sniffles start to slow.

Techno presses all the way up against him, chest against Tommy's back and begins to hum one long, low note. Tommy leans into it, feeling the way it vibrates from Techno's chest to his, and matches the note.

They hold it in tandem for a while before Tommy cuts himself off with a wheezing gasp. His sobs cease and he slowly falls back into a regular pattern of breathing. And somehow, in that moment where everything in Tommy's life is spiraling, he's able to put a pause to it as Techno holds him close.

"I'm really stressed," Tommy admits quietly, because it's true. He doesn't think he quite realized how stressed he had become, but it's been building for a while. A new kid in the house is a huge change. It's a huge change and Tommy's thrown off balance. He's already trying to handle every day life which can be a challenge in itself but now he's talking to a brand new foster sibling.

And those relationships are tricky to navigate. It's hard living with a complete stranger one day. Especially a stranger who has a handful of trauma following them around just like Tommy. It's been work trying to get along, trying to figure things out.

Now with this whole Niki thing and Ranboo obviously not doing too hot if the increased self-harm is anything to go by, well it's a lot.

Tommy feels a bit bad admitting that because certainly if things are a bit hard for him they're so much worse for Ranboo and Phil who are caught in the middle of this mess. Tommy's pushed his emotions about all this to the side for a while just to make space for them.

He's done his best not to complain or ask for help even when he probably needed it because he doesn't want to be a nuisance.

But here with Techno, there's no Phil and there's no Ranboo so Tommy can let himself breakdown a little and allow Techno to give him the much needed comfort and support he has wanted-needed, really- for a while now.

He slowly calms down in Techno's arms, soon nodding off from the exhaustion and time change.

Chapter End Notes

One sentence in this chapter is incredibly ironic to me and none of you know why yet.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

words and other noises

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets to spend some time with Techno before heading home. And once he does head home... well there's a few things he gets to find about

Chapter Notes

CW: mentions of sickness/doctors, weight (very briefly mentioned), self harm (mentioned), ableism, internalized ableism, invalidation, tics, self worth issues, self sabatoge, insenitiveness, miscarriage (discussed), sex (very briefly discussed/mentioned), crudeness

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Tommy wakes, he's starving. His stomach growls. Techno chuckles from behind him, in the same position from when Tommy had fallen asleep.

"Wanna get some food?" Techno offers.

Tommy nods.

Moments later they exit the room and in the main room sits two guys. Asumedly, one of them is Dream, Techno's roommate.

"Hi!" says the blonde, perking up and standing to greet him, "I'm Dream, you must be Tommy."

"Uh, yeah," he says, "Nice to meet you." He takes Dream's offered hand and gives it a shake. It's only fairly awkward.

"You're British," Dream notes, eyes wide as he looks at Tommy, then Techno.

"Yes?" he agrees.

"Techno you're not British."

"No I'm not," he agrees.

Dream looks back and forth between them and Techno smirks lightly. Tommy does his best not to giggle, enjoying the confusion that's spread out on Dream's face.

“Dream, we’re both adopted. I’ve told you that,” Techno reminds.

“No yeah, I know. But you never told me your brother was British!”

It’s so stupid, especially because it’s been so long now but Tommy gets a giddy wave of pleasure when Dream so naturally calls him Techno’s brother.

The other person gets up from the couch and walks over to them.

“Hi,” he says, “I’m Sapnap.”

Tommy gives him a small nod.

“Is this why you always understand the weird shit that George says?” Dream asks, still stuck on the fact that Tommy is British.

“You act like George doesn’t speak English.”

“Sometimes I don’t think he does! I can’t believe I didn’t know your brother’s British.”

“My whole family is, actually,” Techno tells him.

“What?” Dream asks, eyes huge as if his mind was at maximum information.

“Well, actually,” Techno says, “The new kid my dad’s fostering is American. So two versus three.”

Something inside of Tommy twists at Technos words, recognizing that he’s put himself on the same side as Ranboo.

It’s stupid really, Tommy likes Ranboo. It’s just, it’s just Ranboo’s kind of a lot. And he hates to say it like that because it sounds mean or like he’s hating on Ranboo. It’s just- Ranboo’s taking a lot of time and energy right now. Which is okay! It is! Relly!

But uh, it sometimes starts to feel like there’s not really any time for Tommy in there.

Tommy pushes those thoughts out of his mind and does his best to move on. He’s trying to enjoy his long weekend with Techno, not worrying about stupid Ranboo.

Techno and him leave the door, walking a short distance to a fast food place nearby when Tommy starts to feel this small itch.

An itch he’s felt before, just once, not long ago.

What is this?

He ignores it, working hard on not giving in and doing his best to focus on Techno, who’s telling him... something.

But the itch is so hard to ignore and it keeps building and building and building. It’s all he can focus on. All he can focus on is the itch and not giving onto it.

"Tommy?" Techno asks.

The call of his name grabs Tommy's attention, quickly pulling him away from the thoughts of holding in the itch. Which is another way of saying he gives into it.

"Pog," he says quickly, head jerking up to the side.

He clamps his lips closed after he does, flushing in embarrassment and determined not to say that word again. He doesn't have to try hard, because whatever itch was there is now gone.

Techno looks at him oddly.

"Pog?" he asks.

And shit now that Techno's said it, the itch is back and Tommy has to repeat it.

"Pog," he snaps back, instantly and instinctively.

Techno scrunches his eyebrows together.

"What's pog?"

"Pog," Tommy parrots.

The other day it had just been once, a small itch, a deep need to say the word. He couldn't stop it.

But he only felt the need to say it once.

But this time... this time he needs to say it again.

"Pog," he repeats and there's another itch. His head flicks up to the side again, and this time he wrinkles his nose with it.

And just like the itch started, it fades. Techno's still looking at him.

"New stim?" he asks.

But no, no that's not what this is. Stimming is nice most of the time and it's more voluntary than this is. Stimming has a reason, a source, even when he doesn't want to stim.

This is- this is like having an itch and needing to scratch it but scratching it makes him say a weird word and shake his head. It has no reason, no cause. It just happens.

"No," Tommy mutters, "No I dunno. It's weird. I can't control it."

Techno frowns at him, and that's when Tommy realizes how weird his words must sound.

"I mean-" Tommy says. He thinks of trying to justify it, to show Techno he's not weird, but... Well he doesn't have anything else to say about it.

How can he define an action he doesn't understand himself?

"You can't control it?"

"No," Tommy sighs. There's no use lying, "it just sort of happens."

"That's," Techno frowns. Tommy waits for the 'that's weird' that is about to happen. Maybe if he expects it, it'll hurt less.

"I think I've heard of that," Techno notes.

Tommy perks up.

"You have?"

Techno shrugs.

"I dunno. Maybe, I think. If it keeps happening make sure to tell Phil, okay?"

Tommy nods.

"It's only happened a few times," he says, "it'll probably go away."

Techno gives him a small nod and they refocus on getting food.

He gets back home two days later. It wasn't a long visit, but it was a nice break and Tommy had missed Techno. His first day back at school, Tubbo asks him all about it.

"So, what'd you do?" he asks as if Tommy hasn't been texting him everyday for the three days he was gone.

Tommy shrugs.

"Not a lot," he admits, "Techno showed me parts of the city which was cool."

"Oh neat. Did you get to meet the dog?"

"Oh right!" Tommy says, eyes going wide. He bounces a little and flicks his fingers. "Floof is so cute. Apparently he's actually named Steve but no one calls him that cause he's just this white floof ball. He likes to like toes which is kinda gross but he's so cute so whatever. And he gives the best cuddles. When Techno comes home this summer I am definitely stealing his dog."

Tubbo stares at him a bit blankly. Tommy cringes a bit. He probably ranted too much. Tubbo doesn't usually mind his rants and infodumps, but now he's giving Tommy that look.

"Sorry," he says, "Didn't mean to bore you."

"No, no," Tubbo says quickly, shaking his head fiercely, "No sorry, you just said that all really fast, I didn't catch it. Can you repeat, but like, slower?" he asks.

Tommy gives him a look, and hey Tubbo seems genuine so maybe he wasn't annoying. He nods gently and speaks once more about Techno's dog, trying to take his time with his words. Tubbo listens raptly this time, asking questions in all the right places, and Tommy forgets his worries.

Once he gets back, things slow down a bit. Home is in a standstill, Tommy's pretty sure Phil's reached a point where he's done all he can and now it's time to play the waiting game.

Ranboo doesn't seem to like it either, looking hopefully anytime Phil entire a room, and then immediately slouching when Phil has nothing to say. Tommy feels a bit bad for him, he understands getting bad news after bad news, so he does his best to distract him.

They hang out more, playing games.

And even after all this time, with Wil and Techno not home, they still have family evenings so there's that time to.

It's one of those family evenings when Ranboo shares something.

"I cut again today," he admits over a game of Uno. Tears glisten in his eyes, "I'm sorry."

Well... that's a lot.

And to make matters worse, the itch returns.

No. No, not now. The itch builds.

"You don't have to apologize to us for that," Phil says softly, "Are you safe? Did you clean up?"

Ranboo nods. The itch builds. Tommy continues to shove it down. Now's not the time.

"Well you let me check?"

Ranboo nods again.

"Okay, thank you," Phil tells him, "now or after the game?"

"After the game? It's really not bad," Ranboo insists.

"Alright," Phil agrees.

Tommy can barely focus on the conversation anymore, too focused on suppressing the weird urge that's growing in him. It builds under his skin, within him.

"It sucks," Ranboo admits quately, in a moment of vulnerability.

Abd then Tommy fucking ruins it. The itch builds and builds and Tommy wants to stop, doesn't want to do this but he's reached a tipping point and he cant hold it back anymore.

"Pog," he says. And then, worse, he shouts, "THATS POGGERS," he winces at his own words as his head involuntarily jerks up twice to the right.

Phil and Ranboo's attention is now completely on him.

Tommy's face goes red as he realizes what he said, and what he did. He called Ranboo's self harm pog. Holy shit he's a terrible person.

Holy shit he just did that.

His flight response finally kicks in and he lurches to his feet, sprinting for his room.

He collapses on his bed in his room, curling up in a tight ball as his brain wages war against itself. He can't believe he just said that.

He's so mad, so disappointed in himself

Sure he hadn't meant to say it, he had to but... but he has to take responsibility right? His words are still his own. It's his fault.

It's his fault, even if he didn't have a choice.

There's a knock on his door.

"Go away," Tommy shouts.

"Okay," Phil agrees immediately, "I'll be back to check in five."

Fuck this. Tommy squeezes his eyes shut and before another second can pass.

"Wait," he calls. He scrunches his nose suddenly, once more involuntary. Why does this keep happening? What is this?

"...Can I come in?" Phil asks.

"Pog. POGGERS," and that's not what he wants to say! He wants to say his own things, his own words. "Okay," he eventually manages.

Phil enters his room, quickly coming to Tommy's side.

"Hey kiddo," he says.

"I'm not a child," he complains.

Phil gently smooths his hair as he looks down at him.

"Agree to disagree," he says softly. Tommy pouts.

"You wanna talk about what happened?" Phil prompts carefully.

Tommy pulls his gaze away and buries his head into his pillow.

"I didn't mean to," he says, "I didn't- I didn't want to. I promise. I'm not lying. I swear I didn't mean to!"

Tommy does his best to defend himself. He knows it's not an excuse but he's got to do the best he can. He needs Phil to believe him, he needs Phil to know he's not a bad person. He's not! He can't be!

Because- because if he's a bad person, Phil won't love him anymore. And Tommy doesn't think he could handle that.

"I know," Phil says.

Tommy knows Phil probably won't believe- wait what.

"You believe me?" Tommy asks. His head twists to the side. Phil adjusts his hand at the movement, letting it carry him, adjusting to Tommy.

"Of course," Phil says, continuously soothing, "of course I do mate. I will say, I am a little lost. But I believe you. Think you can explain?"

So Tommy does, he shares about the involuntary head motions and sounds, about how it builds and feels like an itch that he works in repressing until he can't anymore and then it just comes out in a big mess.

Phil listens, listening throughout Tommy's explanation, nodding and continuing to soothe him.

"So yeah," Tommy admits, "that's that."

"Do you feel the itch right now?" Phil asks, curious.

Tommy shakes his head. He hasn't been feeling it for a little while now.

And then suddenly it appears again, as if summoned from the new attention on it.

He holds it.

"I, uh, actually yeah," Tommy says, "it came back."

"And you hold it in?" Phil asks.

Tommy nods, giving a bit more attention to the itch. As a result, it itches more and he puts more energy into repressing it, even though it never works.

"What if you don't hold it in?" Phil asks.

Tommy scoffs. Well he'd look stupid for one.

But that's not really an answer, is it?

He shrugs instead, continuing to push the itch down. It's not that hard this time, the itch isn't nearly as strong as it had been in the past.

"Are you willing to try it?" Phil asks.

Tommy blinks. He wants to say no, that again- he'll look like an idiot. But this is Phil and Phil is good and Tommy hates it whatever this is and holding it in is hard and stupid and...

And he just let's go.

"Pog," he says, head flicking up.

And the itch is gone.

"The itch is uh, gone now," Tommy says, a little sheepish, a little embarrassed, "at least until it comes back."

"Was that worse or better than when you held it in?" Phil asks

Well, Tommy doesn't really like either, but at least this time he didn't have to spend all his energy focusing on stopping it to no avail.

"Better," he admits.

Phil nods.

"We'll figure this out," he says, "I'm not really sure what this is Toms, but it is what it is."

Tommy sighs.

"But," Phil continues, "It seems like it's not actually hurting you. And you feel better after you get it out. So if you can, just let it happen, okay Tommy? And we'll talk to the doctor to figure out what's actually going on. But you don't have to hold it on, or hide it."

"It's embarrassing," Tommy mumbles.

"It's okay to feel embarrassed," Phil says, "but I want you to know you have nothing to be embarrassed about. You can't control it, and you feel better after. That's okay."

Tommy doesn't like it, but Phil has a point, so he nods.

"Alright," he accepts, "I'll try."

Here goes nothing.

Tommy thinks that Phil will get up and leave with that, but he doesn't. Instead he stays, hanging around.

Tommy gives him a look, and Phil goes to say something, then hesitates. Tommys even more confused now, he doesn't see Phil unsure often.

"Dad?" he asks.

"I just-" Phil says, before suddenly stopping. He looks down and takes a deep sigh, and for the first time Tommy realizes how tired his dad looks. Phil takes a deep breath. "I know things have been rough at home lately," he says, "There's a lot going on. I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing."

Here's his chance.

Here it is.

Tommy can tell Phil that he's not okay, that he's drowning, that he's suffocating and he doesn't know what to do. He can tell Phil that he feels pushed to the side, forgotten, like there's not enough space for him.

Tommy can say he's struggling, that he needs help.

But if he did that, well if he did that Phil would help.

Which is what Tommy wants! But if Phil helps him then that means that Phil will have less time for everyone else. And Ranboo's problems are so much bigger than his right now.

"No I'm good," Tommy insists, "just tired. I'm okay."

Phil gives him a look. Tommy isn't sure he believes him.

"You're sure?" He asks.

Tommy nods.

And just like that, he gets away with it. The days slowly slip by and Tommy continues to suffer.

Summer only brings slight relief.

The first day of summer vacation doesn't feel real. It's a Friday so it just seems like a short week, like midterms. The second and third days are similar, like a normal weekend if a bit longer.

Monday- the fourth day of summer- is when it hits that he's truly on summer vacation.

To celebrate, Wilbur takes him out to ice cream, just the two of them.

"Hey Tommy," Wilbur says over ice cream. This time Tommy has something with caramel, Wilbur going for a chocolate monstrosity.

"Hmm?"

"I have some... uh exciting news to share," Wilbur admits. He wiggles in his seat a bit and Tommy can see how hard he's working to contain his obvious smile.

Something about his brother's pleasure brings him joy, and he finds himself returning the look with a dopey grin.

"What?" he asks.

Wilbur takes a deep breath.

"You're going to be an uncle."

At first it doesn't compute.

"What?" he laughs, "I- what? Wil I thought you said you couldn't have kids."

"I can't knock someone up," Wilbur corrects, "doesn't mean I can't get knocked up."

All the little pieces slowly start to click. How Wilbur's been sick on and off but Phil hasn't been worried. The doctor's appointment that seemed a little too suspicious. The slight weight gain, the sudden dislike for some foods.

"Holy shit," Tommy says, "holy shit. You're pregnant."

Wilbur nods, practically beaming.

"No," Tommy breathes out, "Who- who else knows?"

"Dad," Wilbur says.

"Okay and..?" Tommy presses, "who else?"

Willbur gives him an odd look.

"And my doctors?" Wilbur adds, "Tommy you're the first person I've told."

Wil... Wilbur told Tommy first? Or well- second because Phil- but Phil doesn't count because of course Wilbur told Phil first, he's Phil. He's their dad, it was never a question. But Tommy... Tommy was the first after Phil?

"What about Techno?" Tommy asks. Techno was here first. Wilbur's known him longer.

"I'll tell him soon," Wil promises.

A thousand questions race through Tommy's head. When did this happen? How did this happen? And okay ew now he's thinking about his brother having sex. But with who? Who the fuck knocked up his brother? How long has Wilbur been pregnant? What's the baby's sex?

Tommy needs to know it all.

He's going to be an uncle.

"You good there?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy blinks, closing his mouth and dragging his eyes away from where they had awkwardly been staring at Wilbur's stomach area.

"I- uh-" Tommy says, "I have so many questions."

Wil snorts.

"Well, go on then," he allows.

"Pog," is the first word out of Tommy's mouth and dammit he hadn't even noticed the itch this time. But Phil said, Phil said to let it happen until they have more information. So he does. His head jerks up to the right once, twice, thrice. He leans back in his chair and wrinkles his nose. And then he's done.

Wilbur's looking at him.

"Sorry," Tommy says, "I uh, this thing has been happening. I do these little movements and say things I can't control."

Wilburs eyes are a bit clouded, and Tommy can see the clear confusion.

"You don't need to apologize," Wil says. And Tommy knows he's lost, but he's still so supportive.

But fuck this whatever it is man, Tommy wants to move on.

"So questions," he says. And God he has so many.

"Who?" Tommy asks first.

Wilbur's smile immediately falls and he gets that faraway anxious look on his face. Tommy-maybe Tommy shouldn't have asked that.

"Not in the picture," Wilbur says. "Next question?"

"Oh- um- alright. Baby? When does baby here?"

Wilbur snorts for a second, and then bursts out into actual laughter, peels of giggles rippling through him. Tommy blushes, pulling his knees up and shoulders in as the heat rises to his cheeks. A few people in the shop give them odd looks, but Wilbur ignores them. Eventually, Wilbur's giggle comes to a stop. Thank god.

"I'm officially done with the first trimester," Wilbur says, "so like six months more."

Look, Tommy wouldn't say he's smart. He's pretty shit at school, never been one to pay attention. But he gets passing grades, so there's that.

But he does remember from his biology class that baby's stay inside for nine months. And he knows from math class that 3 months over 9 months is equal to 1 over 3 and Wilbur said he's done with the first trimester. Tri as in three because there are three sections of pregnancy.

Which means...

"You're a third of the way done with being pregnant and you just told me?" Tommy shouts.

The other people in the shop begin to stare at them again. It's Tommy's turn to ignore them.

Wilbur gives him a look. It's not one Tommy recognizes.

"Did you know that 20% of people miscarry in the first trimester?" Wilbur remarks.

Tommy blinks.

No. No he did not know that.

"And that isn't considering complications," Wilbur said, "and being intersex is kind of a major complication."

Oh. Oh he did not know that.

"So uh-" Wilbur shrugs, "I mean you can still miscarry after the first trimester, but it goes down to like, 5% in the second trimester. And uh- well that percentage stays about the same for me. Even with my complications. So... So yeah, I'm telling you now."

"Alright," Tommy says, "Alright. That's- POGGERS! That's poggers!- fair."

And yeah- yeah that is fair. Not poggers actually.

They go back to their ice cream.

Tommy's not even one bite in when he starts with more questions.

"When did you tell Phil?"

"The minute I found out."

Tommy nods, that's fair.

"What's the sex?"

"Don't know."

"You don't look pregnant."

"I will."

"When are you talking to Techno?"

"Soon."

"Ranboo?"

“After we get back. I wanted to tell you each separately.”

“Are you gonna keep it?”

“That’s the plan.”

“Can I name it?”

“No.”

Tommy frowns.

“First Ranboo and Tubbo didn’t let me name their demon plastic baby and now you won’t even let me name your really baby,” Tommy complains. Which okay ew weird Tommy doesn’t like referring to the thing growing inside of Wilbur as a baby that’s weird. “You should name it Tommy jr.”

“No.”

“Bitch.”

“Child.”

And ugh that’s fucking weird Wilbur calls him a child but soon enough he’s going to have one of his own. How fucking weird is that?

“Babies are gross,” Tommy points out as his head flicks up to the side.

“They are,” Wilbur agrees.

“Do I really get to be an uncle?”

Wilbur’s face softens.

“Of course,” he says, “You’re going to be a really good Uncle Tommy.”

And well- Wil believes in him, so Tommy’s gotta believe in himself, yeah?

In that first week of summer, Tommy mostly chills, hangs at home and sleeps in, glad to be done with finals. It’s on one of those days that Tommy gets a text from Tubbo.

Tubbo: hey i have something to tel u

Tubbo: meet up at the park?

Tommy: sure. now?

Tubbo: ye. see u in a bit

Tommy doesn’t want to admit it, but those texts send his heart racing. He’s had bad experiences with those words. The worst of which ended with him out of a home again. And

he has a home now, one he gets to stay in. But that doesn't stop the terrifying drop of his stomach at the words.

Tubbo's not going to like... say they can't be friends anymore, right? Did Tommy do something wrong? He doesn't think he has but maybe he did do something and didn't realize it.

Before he realizes his hands are shaking on his grip on his phone. He realizes he's starting to panic a bit and takes a deep breath.

There's no need to panic, he tells himself. If he's this worried, he can just ask.

So that's what he does.

Tommy: is it like,,, something bad?

Tommy: did i do something

Tubbo: shit sry no

Tubbo: sry shud have realized that would have ben triggering

Tubbo: its justlike

Tubbo: a thing

Tubbo: to talk abt

Tubbo: abt me

Tubbo: does that make sense.

Honestly...

Tommy: not really

Tubbo: lul

Tubbo: meet me there its not anythig w/ u dont worry

Tommy: okay

Tommy gets up, slightly reassured by Tubbo's texts, even if they are a bit odd. He grabs his water bottle and shoves his phone in his pocket as he shots out to Phil that he's heading out. He passes Ranboo who's on the couch in the living room reading a book and grabs his bike, heading down the street.

He arrives after Tubbo, which isn't really surprising because he had a bit of a head start.

"Hey," Tomy calls from behind him as he puts his bike on the rack.

Tubbo doesn't look over, and Tommy calls again.

Tubbo lifts his head up at the noise, looking around for a few seconds before finally turning and spotting Tommy. He grins widely and bounds over.

"Hey," he greets in return, and starts walking. Tommy is forced to follow.

Now that they've met up, his heart's starting to pound a little bit. He shoves his hands in his pockets.

"So," he says, jumping right to the reason they're here, "what's up."

Tubbo hesitates.

Tubbo hesitates and it shouldn't be such a big deal but with his hair grown out a bit longer and the few new inches from puberty he's gained he almost reminds Tommy of a younger version of foster parent 4.

He remembers foster parent 4 coming up to him on a sunny afternoon, putting a hand on Tommy's shoulder.

Tommy had asked what was up, and he hesitated. Less than a week later Tommy had moved onto a new placement.

"What," Tommy demands, a bit of an edge creeping into his words, "pog. Hey!"

Well that's a new sound.

Tubbo gives him a look, "Dude, chill," he insists. Tommy knows he's not talking about the noises- they've already talked about those- but the firm tone he's suddenly taken.

Tommy bristles at the words and snaps back, "Hey you asked me to come out here."

"Yeah to tell you something!" Tubbo protests.

"Well you're not telling me anything," Tommy hisses.

"I would if you would lay off," Tubbo bites back, "This is kind of a big deal to me asshole."

Tommy goes back to snap again, remembering how he had thought number four might actually be different, how he had kind eyes and a warm smile. He builds his next dig at Tubbo, preparing and then...

And then he pauses and considers his actions as his nose wrinkles. He looks at Tubbo, watches how instead of puffed up and angry he's actually slinked away from Tommy and pulled his shoulders in. His head is down and he won't meet Tommy's gaze.

Tubbo invited him out here to tell him something. Something that's maybe a big deal. Tommy's coming into this with aggression and fear and he's hurting Tubbo by lashing out from a place of past trauma. This won't get them anywhere. What Tommy's doing won't help.

He takes a breath and reflects.

"Sorry," he says, "I was- I was sorta dick then yeah?"

Tubbo meets his gaze.

"I got scared," he admits, "I'm sorry, I'm listening now."

Puffy is going to be so fucking proud of him at his next session.

Tubbo's familiar smile returns and he gives Tommy a lingering look before nodding.

"Thanks," he says.

"Course Big Man."

"So uh," Tubbo carries on, "The thing I was going to tell you?"

Tommy nods, does his best to look encouraging and open. Those things have never been his strong suit, but he'll try his best for Tubbo.

"I, um," Tubbo stutters, "So I..." He takes a deep breath collecting himself.

"I have hearing aids now," he tells Tommy.

Tommy lets out a surprised laugh.

"Hearing aids?" he asks.

"Yeah," Tubbo admits, "For the hearing loss."

Uh. What?

"I- wait- I didn't know- when- why didn't you- you have hearing loss?" Tommy sputters out.

"Yeah. I uh, I do," Tubbo admits, "found out like... two months ago."

"Wait but like, how?" Tommy asks, "How does that even happen?"

Tubbo shrugs.

"They don't actually know," Tubbo says, "Just that I've got it. Uhm, it's not that bad. But bad enough to need hearing aids. And it could be progressive."

Progressive? Could Tubbo like... go deaf?

"It won't be though," Tubbo says, "and really it's not that big of a deal. I just wanted to tell you because I'm supposed to be wearing my hearing aids and you'll probably notice them. So that's what they are."

Tommy looks over, peering at Tubbo's ears that are partially hidden by his hair. He doesn't see anything in them.

"I don't see them," he admits.

Tubbo giggles.

"That'd be because I'm not wearing them right now Big Man."

"Oh okay," Tommy says. Which doesn't really make sense. Why does Tubbo have them if he doesn't need them? He's talking to Tommy just fine. That's kinda weird. But whatever it's Tubbo's life not his.

"They feel weird," Tubbo admits, "and I dunno, stuff sounds weird through them."

"It does?" Tommy asks.

Tubbo nods.

"It's- It sort of almost sounds mechanical?" he offers, "Like a radio or always listening through headphones. But not at the same time. And like direction and noise levels are weird and stuff."

"Is that why you're not wearing them?" Tommy asks.

"Sorta? I guess," Tubbo says. He looks away, not meeting Tommy's gaze. A weird static energy starts to form between them. Tommy doesn't really know what to say.

"Uhm, I think I'm gonna head home now," Tubbo fumbles, "I actually have a lot of chores."

"I could come over and we could do your chores together?" Tommy offers, "and then hangout,"

Tubbo gives him a glance.

"Nah, not tonight Big Man, maybe another time."

Tommy sinks.

"Uh, okay," he says, "See you around I guess?"

"Yeah," Tubbo agrees, "see you around."

And with that, they split up, going their separate ways. Tommy can't help but feel like he should have said something, stayed longer, done something more, done something better. But Tubbo's already disappeared so that's that he guesses.

Tommy goes home and runs into Ranboo in the living room. Ranboo turns to face him from where he's been reading.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Yeah?" Tommy half asks, still a little thrown off after his conversation with Tubbo.

"Where were you?" He asks.

"With Tubbo," Tommy says. He had told Phil and Ranboo before he left, but he's not surprised Ranboo forgot. Little facts like that aren't important Ranboo tends to easily

forget.

"Oh, right. Tubbo was going to talk to you about his hearing stuff, huh?"

Tommy freezes.

"What?" he demands

Ranboo stutters, "uh... was that not..."

Tubbo told Ranboo before him? But Tommy is his best friend! Why would he tell Ranboo first?

"Sorry I thought he told you," Ranboo says, "he said- i- I swore he said..." Ranboo trails off and goes digging in the bag at his side- most likely for the memory book he always carries with him.

"No he did," Tommy says, "but he told you first? Hey!"

Ranboo freezes. Shit Tommy handy meant to say that part. Goddamit why can't he ever think before he speaks?

"Uh... yeah?" Ranboo stutters, eyes wide, "I guess?" He hesitates, "but like its not- he told me-"

"Whatever," Tommy mutters, and he stomps all the way up to his room. And for that entire first week of summer, he mostly holes up all alone and does his best to relax.

During that first week he also finally gets an answer to the involuntary noises and movements.

They're called tics apparently, and they're not uncommon in people who have ADHD.

The downside, they can't do anything to make them go away. They might get better with meds, maybe, but there is no guarantee. He might grow out of it, or stop one day, but once again, no guarantee.

So he just deals with it.

It's not horrible, or terrible, but Tommy still feels awkward whenever it happens, like he's being a nuisance, an annoyance. He hates being those things.

But it becomes a bit easier after a phone call with Techno. Techno points out that Tommy's thoughts seem to feature more than a bit of internalized ableism.

Which is... well which is true.

He's still embarrassed, and still feels awkward, but he's working on self validating and reminding himself it's okay. It's- it's natural and he doesn't need to feel bad or apologize for it.

It's hard. He brings it up in his therapy session, and now Puffy and him work on tackling it together.

Tommy knows it's going to take a bit of work, but at least he's started.

He's not happy with it, but it'll have to be enough for now.

Chapter End Notes

yall wanna know the ironic sentence that so many of u freaked out abt? i can reveal it now with this chapter.

go reread last chapter when michael was screaming when tommy gets his first tic. pay attention to tubbos words.

and shoutout to everyone who was all 'WiLbUrS PrEgNaNt.' you were right. i give u a star sticker.

and like compass, we moving from 10 chapters to 12 bc i cant help myself :D

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

coming together

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets to spend some much needed time with family members. Unfortunately, he doesn't get to spend much time with Tubbo.

Chapter Notes

CW: tics, ableism, internalized ableism, autism jokes (made by an autistic character by an autistic author), general shittiness of the foster system, meltdown, unitentional self harm, ableism/cancel culture joke, memory issues/loss

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

From there, Tommy's summer break continues.

On the first day of the second week of summer, Tommy's starting to already get a little stir crazy so he hops down the stairs, hoping to find something to do or someone to bug downstairs. And just his luck, Wilbur's in the living room.

But wait, what?

"What is that?" Tommy demands, eyes glued into Wilbur.

Wilbur shoots his head up to face him, eyes going wide. He looks around a bit before facing Tommy again.

"What is what?"

"Hey! That- THAT'S POGGERS," Tommy claims, pointing at Wilbur's abdomen. But Wilbur still hasn't caught the clue, looking behind himself confusingly.

"No," Tommy says exasperatedly, "that thing. Your stomach."

Wilbur looks down, hand going to his stomach before falling back at his side.

"Oh you mean my baby bump?"

"When the fuck did you get that?" Tommy asks.

Wil laughs, "I've had it for like... two weeks now, that I've noticed. I think this is the first time you can really tell when I have clothes on. And only because this shirt is more form fitting.

Tommy blinks.

Wilbur's pregnant.

Wilbur's going to have a baby.

This is real.

Like Tommy should know that, Wilbur literally told him a week ago it's not like he forgot. But there's a difference with Wilbur telling him and Tommy legitimately seeing the physical effects.

This is real and Wilbur's going to have a baby. He's going to have his own kid and all these new responsibilities. He's going to be busy raising a child.

He won't ignore Tommy, of course he won't, but he won't have time for him. And it's Wilbur and Wilbur's nice so he'll try. He'll spread himself thin trying to make sure Tommy gets enough attention because he's needy like that.

It would be bad of Tommy to take that attention. Wilbur has his baby. He doesn't need Tommy to take up any extra space.

He's going to be the best uncle ever, to protect this kid, to give it the best life ever. Even if that means spending less time bothering Wilbur. It's so worth it.

"Huh," Tommy says, jerking his head up to the right. "that's sort of freaky."

Wilbur laughs.

"If you feel that way now, just wait."

And with summer, Wilbur's home, so Tommy gets to spend everyday with his brother who's stomach he's maybe watching every day for no reason at all. Most days Tommy still can't even notice the baby bump, just like Wilbur had said. Tommy wonders how long that'll last. And not only is Wil home, but Techno's coming home too.

Tommy gets to pick him up from the airport with Phil. He's only a little smug about it all.

Wil wanted to go too, so they played rock paper scissors for it. Airports have always been incredibly overwhelming for Techno, so Phil only allows one of them with. And Tommy won the game.

So he sits in his front seat spot (which he knows he'll eventually have to give to Techno) as they loop around the pick up, waiting for Techno's text. They're a little bit early, but Phil prefers it that way. It's better to get Techno out of the airport environment as soon as possible,

so a little early and having to wait is better than a little late and Techno having a full blown meltdown on the curb.

Tommys phone buzzes.

“Tech’s here,” he announces, reading out the exit he’s waiting at. Phil nods, and they make their final loop around.

Techno’s height and hair make him easy to spot. It’s not every day you miss a very tall person with long bright pink hair.

Except, well, Tommy sees the tallness and the bright pink hair. But it’s not long.

“Holy- Hey! Pog- Holy shit Techno cut his hair,” Tommy says. Phil blinks and pulls the car to the curb. Tommy can only stare even though he should be getting out and hopping in the back.

Phil has to be shocked too because as far as Tommy knows, Techno’s always kept his hair long. Techno’s hair is important to him, special. He has this whole thing about it, only letting certain people touch it. It went from close to reaching his butt in length to a short undercut.

What the fuck. Tommy had just seen him like a month ago and his hair had still been long.

Phil hops out of his place in the front seat, circling around the car and taking Techno’s bag. Techno’s not looking so hot, headphones shoved over his ears and rocking back and forth. When Phil takes his bag, something releases and he flaps his hands sharply, letting out a keening whine.

“I got you, mate,” Phil says gently, moving around him to put the suitcase in the back.

Tommy takes this as his own call to action and hops out of the front seat, leaving the door open as he moves to the back. But even though he leaves the door open, Techno doesn’t make any move to it. Tommy debates jumping out and trying to help more, but a moment later Phil’s back from the boot and at Techno’s side.

“Let’s get you home,” he says, “take the front seat.”

Techno rocks for a few seconds longer before stumbling towards the seat, and practically falling into the car. Phil closes the door behind him. It snaps softly shut.

Tommy buckles up his seat belt and helps Techno with his own as Phil jumps back into the passenger seat. Tommy’s grateful that the seatbelt texture doesn’t seem to be too much for Techno right now, because he’s slipped out of it before, which isn’t exactly the safest option. But he leaves it alone which is nice. It means they don’t have to balance Techno’s sensory needs vs safety features. Always a bonus.

He rocks in his seat, pulling his knees up to his chest and brings his hand up to lightly tap at his head. Moments later Phil is pulling away from the curb.

They get out of the pick up loop and Tommy reaches towards the small bag next to him that's been prepared.

"Hey Tech," Tommy says, making sure he keeps his voice soft, "We got some stim shit if you want it."

Techno ignores him, even when Tommy drops the bag in the middle of Phil and him. That's fine. It's there if he needs it. Tommy hops on his phone, happy to be around his brother and waiting for whenever he's ready to interact. Techno keeps tapping his head.

Ten minutes in to the hour drive home and Techno's taps increase to sharp hits. Phil catches sight of it from the corner of his eye. Looks like the meltdown's going to get worse before it gets better than. That sucks. Tommy doesn't get sensory overload as bad as Techno, nor does he get meltdowns, but he does know how absolutely draining they can be.

"Tech, think we can do something else?" Phil says, "You can hurt yourself hitting your head like that."

Techno gives a whine. Tommy's guessing that's the best form of communication he can handle right now. He doesn't stop hitting.

"Hm, how about a tangle?" Phil suggests, "humming? Can we go back to tapping instead of hitting?"

Techno continues to hit his head, giving Phil no response. He's bashing pretty hard. Tommy knows he's definitely going to leave a bruise.

"Do you need the pressure Tech?" Tommy asks, speaking up.

Techno uses his free hand to tap twice.

"Is that a yes?"

Techno taps twice again.

"If Phil pulls over and you sit in the back with me, would it help if I squeezed you? We didn't bring a weighted blanket."

Techno taps twice.

"Alright mate."

"Mate," Tommy tics back in Phil's accent

Phil continues, "sounds like a plan." He turns on his blinker.

Not long after they pull over completely and Techno's shuffling back to join Tommy and they're grappled tightly together in the back of the car.

They drive home like that and they're about fifteen minutes away when Techno's verbal again.

"Good to see you kiddo," he says, pushing a corner of his headphones off, "Dad."

"Good to see you too mate."

"Don't- hey!- call me that," Tommy grumbles.

"Sorry. Child," Techno corrects.

Tommy pokes him in his side in retaliation.

"Dad," Techno whines, "Tommy poked me."

"Boys," Phil warns, trying to hide the stupid smile creeping across his face, "Behave or I'll turn this car around."

"Please, anything but the airport," Techno moans. That garners a small laugh from Phil and Tommy.

"You cut your hair," Phil points out.

Techno stills from where he's intertwined with Tommy.

"Yeah," he admits, "I did."

"I wasn't expecting that," Phil says.

And Tommy doesn't know how or when, but the mood has shifted. There's a tenseness in the car that wasn't there before. Tommy shifts uncomfortably.

"Dream cut it for me," Techno says, "I like it," he hesitates for a second, "You're not like... mad right?"

"Of course not," Phil immediately confirms. Techno relaxes.

"I know- you doing my hair was our thing-" Techo says, "I just... I wanted to try it."

"I think that's great," Phil confirms, "and maybe, if you're okay with it... well short hair needs trimming more often. Maybe we can figure that out together."

"Yes," Techno responds immediately, "Yeah that sounds good. Thanks Dad."

Tommy's so glad Techno's home.

They chat a little more on the rest of their way home, but not much. Techno struggles to carry conversations and Tommy and Phil are both giving him space after his meltdown.

In another situation it might be awkward, the mostly silence that they're in. But social faux pas are their normal, so it all works out perfectly.

And anyway, they're home soon enough.

Tommy helps with Techno's bags this time, and a few seconds later they're through the front door.

"I'm going to assume you're Ranboo?" Techno asks the tall string bean that had been hiding half behind Wilbur. If his plans had been to hide, they quickly failed considering the minute Techno had walked through the door Wilbur had raced forward and asked permission for a hug.

When Techno had consented, Wilbur had embraced him in a bear hug.

"Uh, yeah," Ranboo says, shuffling forward slightly.

"Nice to meet you," Techno says, giving him a nod.

"You too," Ranboo responds. He fiddles with his hands, looking towards the side. Techno doesn't seem to mind, he's actually probably grateful for the lack of attempted eye contact. Now that Tommy thinks about it, he doesn't think he's ever noticed Ranboo initiate eye contact either.

That seems to be Techno's main bit of interaction with the new person living in their home, because he turns back to Wilbur.

"Heard you're pregnant," he says, looking down at the small but now apparent baby bump Wilbur has.

"Just a little bit," Wilbur responds, "You cut your hair."

"just a little bit," Techno repeats. The two of them look at each other for another moment, and then Techno pulls his older brother close once more.

Tommy's really happy to have his family home. And Techno can finally take over the garden again. Tommy's really scared he'd kill something if left alone with the plants for much longer.

Techno eventually pulls away from Wilbur and they all stop crowding the door and move towards the living room instead.

"I didn't know you were also autistic," Techno says to Ranboo as they all flop down onto the couches and chairs.

"Uh, what?" Ranboo asks. Techno seems to not notice the confusion in the room.

"Yeah. Tommy joined me with the ADHD gang, and now I have you for the autie gang."

"I- uh- um- I'm- I haven't been diagnosed as autistic?" Ranboo says.

"Oh," Techno says, "Uh..."

It's Phil who catches Ranboos specific word choice.

"Ranboo," he says softly, "What, what did you mean by you haven't been diagnosed."

Ranboo freezes.

"I well... I mean it's been talked about, And Niki wanted me to go through with testing but... well the system thought that wouldn't be good because, y'know, harder to get placed and shit. So..."

"Holy shit," Phil says, "Holy shit. I can't believe I missed this."

Phil stands and walks to the other side of the room.

"That... Ranboo why didn't you say something?"

Rnboo shrugs.

"We had just been talking about how we were going to do diagnostic testing," Phil continues, "We- you knew there was something more."

Ranboo shrugs again, and looks down.

"Sorry," he mutters.

"No, no," Phil says softly, "That's- no that's not... Ranboo I'm not upset. I'm just glad we figured out a piece of what's going on."

"Wait, what," Tommy butts in, because hey- impulsiveness, "Ranboo's autistic?"

Everyone turns toward Tommy.

"Honestly Tommy," Techno says, "Sometimes I think you're the autistic one with how oblivious you are."

"Hey," Tommy teases, "That's-THEAT'S POGGERS- sorry, that's ableist, I could cancel you for that."

"We're oppressed enough," Techno says, "let me have this."

Ultimately, Tommy doesn't hang around the living room too long. He loves spending time with Techno and he's happy to have him home, but he also just stayed in a car for a few hours and he's itching to do something.

He lets Phil know he's going for a walk and heads out the door.

He starts off with just a walk but then his mind gets moving a bit, thoughts wandering and he picks up to a run. He's not even sure where the thoughts start to come to.

But they show up and Tommy can't help thinking about like... how last week when summer had just started Tommy had heard laughter from all the way downstairs and had gone down

to see what was up and found Tubbo and Ranboo on a call. They had been laughing hysterically, watching some weird YouTube musical together that lasted over an hour.

Tommy never heard Ranboo be that loud, and it was that moment he realized he hadn't heard Tubbo laugh like that in a long time as well.

It's weird, his and Tubbo's relationship had been kinda strained lately and Ranboo and Tubbo seem to be getting along so well, Tommy's jealous, he knows he is but he's being stupid.

Tubbo can hang with who he wants. Tommy can share. Tubbo isn't his to control.

It still hurts. He keeps running.

He gets back for dinner and races up to the shower to quickly rinse off before his entire family complains about how much he smells.

He gets done just as Phil is calling them all down and he joins Wilbur as they leave the upstairs for the dining table. Ranboo and Techno meet them there, all converging.

Tommy's gotten used to sitting next to Phil instead of further down the table since Wilbur and Techno moved out, but everyone knows how important the consistent seating arrangement is to Techno, so Wil and him both take their old seats they had when all of them were at home.

Phil doesn't have to switch, considering he's always stayed at the head.

Ranboo sits as well, taking his own normal seat. But considering he's never lived here during the time Techno has, he doesn't know how important the seating arrangements are to Techno. Nor does he know that the seat he's chosen is Techno's.

Tommy gives a look at Wil, who gives him one back. They ask a silent shared question of 'should we say something?' before looking at Techno.

Techno's frozen from where he had moved to sit in his original seat. His eyes go wide and one of his hands instantly goes to clutch at his hair. Ranboo is blissfully unaware and Phil's back is still turned as he grabs the last plate from the counter.

Tommy's wondering if he should jump in. He does want to speak for or over Techno, but Techno's already been nonverbal and had a meltdown today and Tommy wants to help support him so he doesn't get to that point again. Plus, Techno's is obviously looking fairly distressed, giving off signs of nearing another meltdown.

But instead, Techno just drops to the seat next to Ranboo, not saying anything about the seating arrangement. He rocks back and forth in his seat, obviously distressed, but doesn't say a word of opposition against Ranboo's decision.

Tommy frowns, very lost at the situation.

Techno never sits anywhere else at the table. Tommy knows that, it's- it's not that Techno prefers a specific seat over any other, it's that it's his seat.

Techno had tried to explain it to him, explain how things had to be Right and that seat was Right for him, how it had always been his seat, a pattern, and now it couldn't be changed.

Tommy did his best to understand. He still didn't completely get it, never having experienced that himself. But just because he hasn't had the same experience doesn't mean he can't support and understand Techno's perspective.

Techno doesn't sit anywhere else at the table.

And now he's sitting next to Ranboo, in what he would call a Wrong seat.

Phil returns to the house table, pushing one of the platters towards Ranboo.

"Mate," Tommy says in Phil's accent as he sits. He flushes furiously. He knows he can't control it, but he hates how he's picked up on Phil's trademark word and repeats it. He feels like he's mocking his dad, even if he knows better.

No one else pays the tic any attention, all used to them by now. Tommys grateful for how quietly his family has adapted. It makes this all a lot easier.

"Can you pass that around Tech?" Phil asks, also in the pattern of knowing where Techno sits.

Ranboo stares back for a second before shifting his gaze at the other members at the table. Phil hasn't noticed yet, but everyone else is rigid and tense.

Phil blinks and looks at Ranboo, and then over at Techno who's rocking at Ranboo's side.

"Tech?" he asks, "you're not sitting in your seat?"

The question is more than that, they all know it. Or maybe Ranboo doesn't know that. But everyone else does.

"It's fine," Techno dismisses. He shakes his hands out and rocks more. After he shakes them out, his hands go to his head, pulling at his hair. Tommy doesn't know where his tangles have gone.

Ranboo looks back and forth between the two, shrinking away at the intense emotions he's unknowingly trapped between.

"Ranboo can have my seat," Techno says, "it's fine. It's fine. It's fine. It's fine."

"Oh!" Ranboo says, eyes widening. He jumps a little. "Oh I didn't realize this was your seat. I've always sat here."

And well, now that Tommy thinks about it, Ranboo always has. It makes sense, it would be sort of odd for him to choose another seat when it makes the most sense to sit on that side of Phil. But even so when grabbing a snack or doing a project or eating alone, Ranboo always chooses the same seat.

Tommy knew Technos thing with the seat was always an autistic thing. He hadn't made that same connection with Ranboo until now.

"It's okay," Techno says, "I know seats can be important. It's as much yours as it is mine."

"You can take it," Ranboo says immediately, even going as far to stand up.

"No," Techno says, "it's fine."

Ranboo pauses hesitantly.

"It is important to me," he admits. Techno nods.

"Really important," Ranboo confesses.

Techno nods again.

"But I think maybe now you need it more than me."

Techno doesn't turn to look at him, or speak, or give an indication that he's listening, but somehow Tommy can feel the air, the mood, the environment shift.

"You're sure," Techno says. It's not a question.

Ranboo nods.

Techno immediately gets up, taking Ranboo's- his- both of their seats. Ranboo takes the other.

Tommy looks at them, considering. Things are- things are kinda weird right now. It's hard admitting that to himself, but it's true. He feels off kilter, off balance.

It's weird and hard, because things feel wrong. They feel wrong and Tommy struggling to find his place and figure out what's going on.

But what's even harder is even though everything is off and weird right now, Tommy knows it's all going to be okay. He knows he's going to be okay. He knows his family is going to be okay.

It shouldn't be a bad thing, but it almost is because Tommy knows it'll be okay but he had to wait because he can't fix it and it's awful waiting. Tommy hates waiting. He's never been good at waiting. But he doesn't know how to speed up the process.

And seeing Techno and Ranboo both make sacrifices for one another in an instant, Tommy knows things will be okay. Things will work out.

But they haven't yet.

Tommy hates this waiting game.

Wilbur takes them to an arcade the next weekend- him, Ranboo, and Tubbo that is. Tommy takes it for what it is, trying to take it as a start to a relationship.

It's fun. It's a bit outlandish, a bit silly, and he's certainly way too old for this, but he finds himself enjoying it completely anyways. He loses to Wil at some dance rhythm game, beats Tubbo at some basketball game, and finds him fighting against Ranboo for a high score in skeeball.

Tommy laughs at Ranboo's face of concentration, but that quickly turns into a frown when Ranboo sinks another ball into the 100 slot.

Ranboo breaks into a grin, turning to Tommy.

"Ha!" he exclaims triumphantly, "take that."

It's then Tommy's turn to concentrate and they go back and forth like that for most of the game. Ranboo slips up at one point, giving a Tommy a small lead that's just enough for him to get the win.

Tommy holds that fact triumphantly over his head for the rest of the day, and Ranboo's a good enough sport to laugh with him. At one point, Tommy gives him a shove and the taller boy throws his arm around him in retaliation, pulling him close.

It's only been a few days since Techno came home and things are shaken up, but hey Ranboo isn't that bad.

They've been there about two hours when Ranboo leans close to him, pulling him aside a little bit.

"Hey uh-" Ranboo starts. He looks round, looking out of place all of a sudden with a small frown and a darting gaze. "What- what are we doing here?"

Tommy's about to bark out a 'what do you mean?' with a laugh, caught up in the moment, the joy of it all. But he doesn't.

For once he actually catches himself and he looks over at Ranboo, recognizing the expression and the situation. He's seen this before, he's just never caught himself before he made a fool of himself.

"We're- Hey! Mate- at the arcade, Wilbur brought me, you, and Tubbo," Tommy explains.

"Okay," Ranboo says, giving a weak nod.

"Yeah?" Tommy asks.

"Yeah," Ranboo says. He nods again, this time much more firm. He floats away a minute later, sliding over to Tubbo's side when the shorter boy calls him. Tommy watches him go, a small spark of pride growing within him.

The rest of the day is similarly fun. He spends time with his little circle of family/fosterfamily/friends and it's... it's nice. Tommy even gets a nerf gun to shoot Wil with.

And if he ignores the way that Tubbo keeps giggling at everything Ranboo says and how Ranboo lights up and throws an arm over the much shorter boy onto his head like an armrest and smiles.

Well if Tommy ignores that, everything is fine.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so compass hit 100k what the fuck. Thanks yall.

oh and im off anon now ig.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

calling out

Chapter Summary

Tommy's determined to show his family, that he's okay, he's fine, that everyone has more going on than him. His family refuses to accept this. Phil is the first to confront him.

Chapter Notes

CW: jealousy, feeling left out/dismissed/undervalued/replaced, tics, self hate, trauma response, diminishing one's own needs, stress, RSD, discussion of hypothetical mutilation/death, ableism, insensitivity, tics

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo's stealing his brother and Tommy isn't okay with it.

And okay maybe Ranboo isn't stealing Techno, but he's certainly spending a lot of time with him.

Tommy's not jealous. He's not.

The thing is... gardening with Techno used to be a thing that he and Tommy did together, occasionally Wil and Phil joining. But more often than not it was just them two.

But now- now Tommy's fuming from the couch, staring out not so subtly into the backyard as Techno and Ranboo pick weeds from below the berry bushes. He can hear them laughing from here, the open windows letting in the breeze as well as their shared giggles.

"Y'know if you keep staring that hard your eyes might get stick that way," Wilbur points out, flopping onto the couch next to Tommy.

Tommy turns to him, scowling.

"Watchya staring out back for anyways?" Wilbur asks.

"Nothing," Tommy mumbles, continuing to stare. His head jerks up, once, twice.

Wilbur hums, and stares with him.

"Techno and Ranboo weeding?"

"Yeah," Tommy scowls.

"Awww," Wilbur teases instantly, "are you jealous?"

"No," Tommy pouts.

He watches as Techno reaches out with one hand to push Ranboo's head down slightly before releasing. Ranboo bobs it back up a second later and even gets brave enough to elbow Techno as he continues laughing. Tommy's frown deepens.

"Y'know, you could just join them," Wilbur suggests.

Tommy scoffs. Wilbur rolls his eyes at the action and stands. He grabs the back of Tommy's collar and pulls him up as well. Wilbur continues towards the back door, hand still on Tommy's collar as he takes him with him. Tommy protests and twists to get out, but Wilbur manages to manhandle him out the door and into the back.

"Hey," Wilbur calls out.

"Hey!" Tommy calls, half between a tic and an actual hello.

Techno and Ranboo's heads pop up from the plants in unison. "Mind if we help?" Wilbur asks.

Techno immediately grins in that sort of half way he does. Techno's not exactly one for showing emotions in a physically representative way, so Tommy's gotten used to the small twitches at the corner of his mouth.

He nods once and pulls his hands away from the weeds giving them both a quick flap.

"Of course," he says. He then turns to Tommy, "you as well?"

Tommy nods. Of course him as well. This is Techno and his thing, of course he's gonna garden. That's the entire point.

"Awesome," Techno says. He shifts to the side slightly and Tommy plops down right beside him. He gets set on aggressively pulling out the nearest weeds.

He just grabs and yanks, putting his frustration from being excluded into tearing up the plants that steal nutrients from the garden.

"That's not how you do it," Techno scowls, reaching over to flick his forehead. "You know how to do it. Do it right."

Tommy preens a bit at the attention. Shifting and puffing up, he gives a nod before returning to destroy the weeds properly. Ranboo moves away to another planter while Techno stays at his side. Tommy considers it a success.

Tommy only stops helping when Phil invites him out to lunch, just the two of them.

"How have you been doing?" Phil asks, tapping a hand in the wheel.

Tommy looks over at him before facing back toward the window. He shrugs.

"Fine I guess."

Phil nods and flicks his blinkers on before turning.

"You've been quiet lately," he bites, "withdrawn. It's not like you."

"Are you calling me loud?" Tommy scowls.

"Yes," Phil agrees.

Which okay, that's fair Tommy is loud.

"I'm- POGGERS, THAT'S POGGERS- fine," Tommy says, because it's true. Everyone's been dealing with stuff lately. Wilbur's pregnant, Techno's moving on with his life, and Ranboo's trying to figure out how to get back to his sister. And behind all of those things is Phil, doing his best to make sure his kids are happy.

Compared to them, Tommy has it easy. Sure he's been a bit stressed lately, felt a bit left out, but that's okay. It's nothing like what everyone else is dealing with.

"I know a lot is going on right now," Phil admits. And see, Phil gets it. "With Wilbur being pregnant and everything to do with Ranboo's case."

Tommy gives a nod of acknowledgement. His head gets stuck that time, and he tics, nodding again and again for a short minute.

"I just want you to know that you are just as important," Phil reminds.

Tommy gives a small nod, paying closer attention to the road out the window than Phil's words.

"Tommy," Phil says.

Tommy tears his gaze away from the window and turns to look at Phil.

"Tommy, you are just as important."

Tommy feels a lump form in his throat.

"I know," he says. But he's not sure if he actually does or if that's just a quick response, what Phil wants to hear. "Hey! It's just-"

"No," Phil cuts in firmly, "no ifs, ands, or buts. You are just as important. Period."

Tommy squeezes his eyes shut and wonders when it got so hard to breathe.

"I know there's a lot going on right now," Phil says, "and I know that's probably weighing on you in addition to normal life stress. You're allowed to be affected by all of this. And you're allowed to ask for support and take up a healthy amount of space in this family dynamic. Alright?"

"Why do you do this," Tommy grumbles, eyes still squeezed shut. He wrinkles his nose up with a tic.

"Do what?" Phil prompts.

How does, how does Phil know what to say? How does he end up saying it exactly what Tommy needs even if it isn't what he wants. How does Phil know these things that even Tommy doesn't? He doesn't understand.

He doesn't know how to put it into words so he just huffs and shrugs.

Phil lets him, and they sit in silence. Or really, it's not that quiet because Tommy keeps ticcing, more than normal. He's been told that can happen with stress and stuff.

Eventually they get to the drive thru, placing their orders and eating greasy burgers in the parking lot. There's something intimate about the experience that you just don't get from going inside.

"I- everyone has a lot going on," Tommy says, "and I'm- I don't. I don't want to- other people need more support than I do right now."

"There's a difference between needing less support and no support," Phil points out, "and you've drawn away completely."

Tommy shrugs. He's doing a lot of that.

"Everyone's issues are just more important, y'know?"

"No," Phil says, "no I don't know that because it isn't true. Even if your issues seem smaller, they are just as important. It's not a challenge of who's struggling the most."

"But I haven't been struggling," Tommy says. Which okay it's mostly true, but there's definitely a bit of a lie in there. And Tommy knows that Phil knows that he's lying.

"Tommy," Phil says, "you're allowed to take up space."

"I just- you're already dealing with so much."

*I am," Phil agrees, and see that's exactly Tommy's point! Phil has all this going on and he doesn't need Tommy's issues on top of everything. "Tommy, I am dealing with a lot of stuff right now, but it's not your responsibility to try and make that easier for me. I'm the parent, okay? I appreciate the sentiment, and I won't deny that having you help out with chores when I'm busy or taking the bus home from school helps a lot. But Tommy, neglecting your mental wellbeing isn't an acceptable sacrifice."

Tommy hesitates.

He hears Phil, he does. But there's just- Like-

"I'm not sure I get it," Tommy admits. His voice is small and he shrinks into himself, "I want to help."

"Which is very appreciated. But there are healthy ways to help. This isn't healthy."

Tommy blinks.

"Okay," he accepts, "so what now?"

They have a talk. And Tommy, Tommy finally talks to someone.

"I just- it's just been a lot," Tommy admits, "And- and I know you've been busy and Ranboo's new and- I guess I've felt a little bit... left out."

Phil immediately frowns.

"I mean it's not that bad, it's not that bog of a deal," Tommy hastily adds on.

"No," Phil says, "Tommy it's okay. It's- your experiences are valid. You don't have to sugarcoat it to make me feel better."

"But I don't want to make you feel bad," Tommy protests.

"Tommy, you could never," Phil promises, "You could never make me feel bad."

"But I hurt you," Tommy protests, and gosh when did tears get there?

"Tommy, I'm hurt because you're hurting. Seeing you hurt hurts because I don't want you to," Phil says, "I hurt because I love you. But that's okay, because it's a hurt I'm willing to endure for the sake of having you in my life. But this hurt- Tommy this hurt that you're putting yourself through all this pain because you don't want to burden others."

Tommy hangs his head. Phil isn't wrong. When is he ever?

"Tommy, can I hug you?" Phil asks.

Tommy gives a small nod and Phil scoops him up. One arm goes over Tommy's shoulder, the other under his armpit and he holds him close, providing perfect pressure all across his body.

"Phil," Tommy says, "Dad, I'm so tired."

"That's okay," Phil says, "You're okay. We're going to be okay."

Tommy sobs into his dad's nice shirt and they stay there for an entire hour.

It's a lot.

As a result, Tommy restarts family therapy. It sort of feels like a step back, versus a step forward, but Tommy quickly changes his mind after the first session.

It's always been hard for Tommy to talk to Phil during the best of times, and well, lately it hasn't been the best of times. Phil's always been open and Tommy knows he can go to him about anything.

Tommy's trying. He is. It's just- well. Okay he knows Phil won't kick him out, he knows that. It's just-

"I think I have this like... deep fear," Tommy says. He looks over Puffy, remembers one of their recent individual session. He then glances at Phil. Who's open and receptive to what he has to say. He's safe here. "It's more than a deep fear," Tommy admits, "It's uh, a trauma thing. A trauma response. I think... I hole up and I don't share things cause I'm scared of being a burden and just... I know you still want me it's... I dunno in the moment it's hard to remember."

"And like- I'm trying to get along with Ranboo and I like him, but I always feel like I'm doing something wrong and-" Tommy shrugs, "I go to this really bad RSD place. And I've really been struggling with that RSD shit lately," Tommy admits, "Just like, feeling like I'm- I dunno- a waste of space and bothering people and..." Tommy trails off. He shrugs once more, "Yeah."

His eyes are misty. When he looks up, so are Phil's. Tommy curls into a ball on the couch.

It's a start.

In the meantime, Tommy makes more of an effort to spend time with his family. He starts by leaving his room more and just, hanging in the communal spaces. It feels kind of weird at times but he's got to stop isolating himself at some point.

Plus, it does work. Wilbur's room used to be the sort of meeting room for all of them, but now that the kids are split half downstairs and half upstairs they gather more in the living room. It tends to work out well, especially considering Wilbur's room is a bit small to hold four people.

Wilbur's lazily strumming his guitar, Techno's enthralled in some book, Phil's on his computer at an armchair, and Ranboo's messing with a Lego set. The only noise is Wil's music and Tommy's occasional tics.

The Lego sets had been one of the things to come out of learning Ranboo's autistic. He's been more confident after techno pointed it out and he had that validation in his life. He's slowly begun to open up about his special interests, and apparently Lego was one of them.

He hadn't even mentioned it before.

Phil and Wil had picked a small set up when they were at a store a week back and Ranboo had cried when handed it. He tried to deny the tears but the red rash lines down his cheeks said otherwise.

He had more sets now, and was recently working on building a plane. Or Tommy was pretty sure it was a plane.

And Tommy- well Tommy was sort of people watching over the top of his DS, observing more than doing his own thing.

This meant that he was the first to notice Wilbur's hesitation on the guitar as he looked down and eventually took his hand off all together and stopped gently strumming.

Wilbur frowned and took a deep breath, and then another.

"You good, Wil?" Tommy asks.

Wilbur turns to him, mid breath.

"Uh, yeah," he hesitates and Tommy doesn't believe for a bit.

Phil looks up at him. Wilbur catches his gaze.

"No, I'm fine, just-"

"POGGERS," Tommy interrupts, "you're," he draws out, "poggers!"

Shit Tommy hadn't meant to interrupt Wil.

"Not quite," Wil acknowledges. It's a casual acknowledgement, they all know it was a tic, but it makes it feel less random and disruptive. Wilbur just takes it as part of Tommy, and carries on. It's exactly what Tommy could have asked for.

"I'm... anxious I guess. I dunno."

Anxious? What's Wilbur anxious about? Nothing's going wrong.

But then again, anxiety doesn't necessarily work like that. Still, something seems off.

"Anxious?" Phil asks, obviously a touch confused as well.

Wilbur shrugs.

"Yeah I dunno," he says, "got that jittery feeling and my stomachs all weird, y'know? Like butterflies."

Techno looks up.

"Are you anxious?" Techno asks.

Wilbur frowns.

"Yes," he offers. He did just say so. But Techno means something different. The problem is they both don't know what.

"No I mean, you said your body feels anxious, jittery, stomach, yeah? But are you actively anxious."

"That's the thing," wil says, "I'm not! I dunno, it's weird. It's like my stomachs doing flip flops kind of."

Techno snorts loudly and then plain out giggles before quickly covering his face with a book when they all look at him.

He groans at the response.

"Did you just giggle?" Wilbur asks.

"No," Techno complains, "and you're not fucking anxious Wil. The baby's moving. It's called quickening this early."

Wilburs eyes widen and he looks down at his abdomen before resting a hand on his baby bump. He waits for a second before pulling his hand away.

"I don't feel anything," he insists.

Techno rolls his eyes.

"Well you're not gonna feel it that way for a while dumbass. But quickening begins at week 16-25 in the first pregnancy. And I doubt I need to tell you what week you're on."

Wilbur goes silent. The entire room holds their breath.

"Fucking anxious little motherfucker," Wilbur complains, "he's a nuisance."

"Wait I thought you didn't know the sex?" Ranboo pipes up. Ranboo's eyes widen, "did you-did you tell us?"

Tommy knows the real questions Ranboo asking is 'did I forget.'

"No, I didn't tell anyone, I don't know," Wilbur says.

"But you uh, called it a he?" Ranboo remarks.

Wilbur shrugs, "I dunno. I just have a feeling."

He picks his guitar back up, resting it in front of his small baby bump, and goes back to short tunes. Slowly, the rest of the family returns to their own actions as well.

It's only later when Tommy heads to bed that night when he realizes what had occurred. Wilbur's kid moved. Wilbur- Wilbur's pregnant and he's growing a baby.

And Wil- Wil is going to love him so much. He's going to be a great dad. He is, Tommy knows he is.

But it- well what if being a great dad means he doesn't have the same amount of time to be a great brother?

Tommy swallows harshly and pushes those ideas away. He doesn't need to be thinking about it.

The weeks pass slowly and he's doing better. Not great but he's communicating more with Phil. It's a start. It's a strong start. Things are improving.

In fact, he's even hanging out with Tubbo more. Tommy had been kind of distant as of late but the other day he invited Tubbo to the park as well as Ranboo, and now here the three of them are, hanging in the shade under a massive tree.

"How much do you think it'd hurt to get your balls cut off?" Tubbo asks abruptly.

Tommy lets out a startled laugh.

"What?" he asks.

"Do you think you would die?" Tubbo asks.

Ranboo gives Tubbo an odd look.

"Why- what- why are you curious about that?" Ranboo says, "Of course it would hurt."

"Yeah but like, how much," Tubbo asks, "And I dunno I was curious."

"Tubbo, your mind is a strange place," Tommy says, turning a bit to look at him. Tubbo gives a small shrug back from where he's sprawled across the ground.

"Hey, actually can we talk about something?" Tubbo asks. Ranboo also turns to Tubbo at the comment, but stays quiet.

"Yeah, 'course," Tommy says, head tipping up with a tic. Ranboo gives a small nod in agreement.

"Y'know how like- I talked about uh, I have hearing loss now?"

And sure, Tommy does know that, but it's not like it's a big thing or anything. Tubbo never talks about it and he barely wears his hearing aids.

He says yes anyways.

"Right," Tubbo says, taking a deep breath, "I- uhm so they don't think it's progressive."

"That's- pog. That's pog, pog- great," Tommy says, "you're like fine then."

Tommy knows Tubbo had been worried about that even though he had never said anything about it. He could tell. He's known Tubbo long enough to catch those things.

So he's not expecting Tubbo to shift uncomfortably at Tommy's words.

"And that's the other thing," Tubbo says, "I'm not fine. It's- I'm hard of hearing. I have a significant amount of hearing loss."

"You've said this before Tubbo," Tommy says.

Rnaboo watches the two of them, sitting in the background and choosing to remain quiet.

Tubbo lets a heavy exhale.

"I know," he says, "I mean it's more- it's more than I've let on. Y'know the other day in the arcade?"

Tommy and Ranboo nod.

"I could barely hear you guys," Tubbo confesses, "there were so many other noises that were louder, and that was really hard for me. I kept feeling like I didn't know what was happening or going on."

Ranboos face falls.

"But you wore your hearing aids," Tommy points out, "they're supposed to help."

"They do," Tubbo admits, "that's- that's with them helping. I- it's hard for me to hear things when there's lots of background noise or when people mutter or speak quietly."

Tubbo sighs, looking away.

Ranboo cautiously speaks up, rapping his foot slowly on the ground as he does so.

"Why are you telling us this now?" he asks, and then immediately after flushes a bright red, "I mean I'm glad you told is!" Ranboos clarifies, "but why now. Is there- why did you want to tell us?"

Tubbo shrugs.

"I've been scared," he admits, "to talk about it. But the two of you are my friends. And like- in the long run talking about it and wearing my hearing aids should make it easier, right? I don't want to be afraid and miss out on everything."

Miss out? What does Tubbo mean by that? He voices his question.

"Like I'll miss words, or part of a sentence," Tubbo explains, "and I could just ask you to repeat, but I don't. Because I'm scared. But then I miss out and don't know what's going on and that's sucks." Tubbo pauses to take a shaky breath. "So I'm going to not do that anymore."

Tommy pulls out his phone, opening it to google. Tubbo gives him an odd look as he punches letters into the search bar.

"What are you doing?" Tubbo asks.

"Women, I'm doing women!" Tommy tics, and then instantly pales. All the blood drains from his face. He's mortified. God that's so fucking sexist. And he just said that?

Sure it hadn't been his choice but still. That was bad, right?

Tommy ducks his head, waits for his friends to tell him off.

A moment passes, and neither of them do. Tommy peeks at their faces.

They all kind of look at each other, wondering what to do.

"Er," Tubbo says, "well. Good luck with that considering you can't get a girlfriend."

There's a beat of silence. Ranboo looks between them. Tubbo's trying to joke, keep the conversation going instead of letting Tommy sit in the awkwardness. Even so, Tubbo's also leaving space for Tommy to interject and say his own thing, do what he wants to do in response to the tic.

But fuck it, Tommy's always been a jokester and that's how he'd like to pass it off. He doesn't want his tics to be a big thing.

"Fuck you," he says, "I could so get a girlfriend."

He moves on after that.

"I'm Googling what to do when your friend says they have hearing loss," Tommy replies, "Because I can tell I'm not doing a very good job at it."

Tubbo stares at him for a moment too long, before bursting into giggles.

"I never thought I'd see the day where Big Man Tommy would actually try to not be insensitive."

"Hey," Tommy says, "I'm not fucking- women- insenstivie."

"You kind of are," Tubbo says, "But that's okay. I love you anyway."

Ranboo sits off to the side, trying to withdraw from what's obviously some sort of moment with the clingy duo.

"So," Ranboo says after a couple of awkward seconds, "Uhm... what did you want us to do?"

Tubbo turns him, breaking his gaze with Tommy. He frowns downwards for a second before shrugging.

"I dunno," he says, "Hadn't really thought about it. Just uh- listen to me I guess?"

Tommy can't stop the bark of laughter that escapes him.

"Bit ironic, innit?" he says, "The hard of hearing guy asking us to listen."

Ranboo's eyes go wide as he looks between Tubbo and Tommy. But a moment later Tubbo himself bursts into laughter and Ranboo quickly follows with his own small giggles.

They'll work this, Tommy knows they will. They can tackle it together.

"I can give you the yahoo answers- Hey! Women- results," Tommy suggests. He wrinkles his nose. Great. Seems like the 'women' tic is staying.

Tubbo scoffs, but holds out his hand anyways. Tommy passes over his phone.

"Ahem," Tubbo says, fake clearing his throat. And oh great he's going to read these outloud isn't he. "Tip Number One," he starts. And yup, here he goes. "Don't speak too q- Don't too slow- don't speak too quickly or too slow. Try to follow a normal peace- pace of speech and e- e- announce clearly without over announcing."

"Announce?" Ranboo asks.

Tubbo shrugs. Tommy pulls the phone toward him.

"Enunciate," he corrects softly. Tubbo nods.

"Yeah that," he agrees. He reads a few others off, talking about background noise and not covering your face, and asking your friend if they seem lost. He starts each tip off with the same sarcastic demeanor, but as he gets further and further the funny voice he's using starts to slip.

He finally gets to the last one.

"Never," he starts smiling and back to a giggly announcer type voice, "and I repeat never say nevermind. If person- If the person who's hard of hearing or deaf asks to you to repeat yourself..." Tubbo trails off. Tommy assumes he stumbles on a word, and leans over to peek at the words.

"Uh..." Tubbo carries on. He swallows. Tommy looks up to see that his eyes look almost misty, "Repeat yourself. As many times as the- pair- person needs. Again and again if- uh- ne- ne... necessity? No- necessary."

Tubbo finishes the tip quietly, lowering Tommy's phone and then handing it back. He sniffles slightly and wipes at his eyes.

"Tubbo?" Ranboo asks cautiously.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "Yeah, can you do those things?"

Ranboo gives Tommy a look, one that screams 'please help me big man I am very out of my depth and you are so much smarter than me.' Yeah Tommy's pretty good at reading looks.

"Of course," Tommy responds, "You've got it Tubso."

And that's that he guesses. So why do things still feel weird between him and Tubbo? Better sure, but still... off. Tommy can't quite place what it is.

Chapter End Notes

my cat is on my calendar. baby i love you but i need that to check my schedule.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

changing faces

Chapter Summary

A lot happens. Summer ends, school starts again and with the changing of the seasons, Tommy's family continues to evolve.

Chapter Notes

CW: feeling of abandonment, discussion of trauma/trauma responses, memory loss, general shittiness of the foster system, mentions of auditory hallucinations, mentions of panic attacks, poor self worth, communication struggles, brief sensory overload, tics

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy does some of his own legitimate research on what Tubbo told him later that night. He also talks to his therapist on how to tackle the situation. The research is for the knowledge on hearing loss and the therapy is for the how to people.

Tommy has a long, awkward conversation with Captain Puffy about his relationship with Tubbo. The truth is- Tubbo means a lot to him. A lot a lot. Tubbo is his best friend. Tubbo was there for him his first day of school, Tubbo was there for him when he was being a brat about staying at Phil's, Tubbo was there for him when he stole Wilbur's meds, and Tubbo was there for him when he was adopted. Tubbo was there for his first birthday as an official adopted family member of the Watson household.

Tubbo's always been there. All of two, three years that is.

That's the longest Tommy has ever had a friend. By a lot.

He wants to help Tubbo, to support Tubbo. Puffy points out how things he did like refusing to repeat himself or brushing off Tubbo's hearing loss could have been invalidating. Tommy vows to fix that.

Tommy doesn't know how to put it into words- or he does, but he doesn't want to. The truth is Tubbo... Tubbo is one of the best people Tommy's ever met. He'd do practically anything for the other. Tubbo deserves all the good things in the world and Tommy will do his best to provide the pieces of good that he can to him.

Tubbo's hearing loss is a bigger thing than Tommy realized. He can realize that, accept that, and support Tubbo in the ways that he expresses he needs support. Tommy's got this.

He still sort of feels like a shit friend.

Tommy's kinda been in this space for a while now where everything's sort of the end of the world to him but that's stupid because it isn't the end of the world so he expects himself to be fine. Maybe it's time to recognize that these things might not be the end of the world, but he's allowed to feel like it is and he's allowed to struggle and it's okay for him to not be... okay all the time.

How about that, huh?

A loud banging on his door breaks him out of those thoughts.

"Yeah?" he calls out.

"Can I come in?" a gruff voice asks.

"Hey! Mate. Yeah," Tommy agrees, and Techno pushes the door open.

He's holding Floof in his hands, pulling him close to his chest with his arms wrapped around him, almost as if in protection. Except there's no need to protect him here.

"Wanna go for a run?" Techno chokes out, staring intensely as Tommy's left eyebrow.

"Uh," Tommy considers. He's- well honestly he's not really in the mood but he sees how Techno's pulled as tense as a wire and how Floof looks up at him, all nervous like. And Tommy doesn't know what's wrong, doesn't know how to help.

"Sure," he says, and Techno lets out a large exhale.

"Yeah," Technos says, and he nods. He sets Floof down and scrubs at his face with his now free hands. "Yeah," he agrees once more, "We're going for a run."

"Mhmm," Tommy agrees, even though Techno doesn't really seem to be talking to him. It's more like he's talking to himself.

Oh. Maybe that's what it's about. The voices Techno hears- the audio hallucinations he has- are probably bad right now. Techno needs a distraction.

Tommy's not sure that's what's going on, but it's a pretty good guess and he's not about to ask Techno.

He could ask Techno, it wouldn't be a big deal. Techno doesn't mind talking about his hallucinations, but Tommy knows that bringing up the voices he hears almost always makes them louder. So while concept wise, Techno doesn't mind sharing, talking about them almost always makes the voices worse for him. And if Tommy's right, and they're already bad right now, he really doesn't want to add to them.

"Let me grab my running shoes," he says instead.

Techno nods, and waits. A few minutes later they're outside, starting up with a steady jog. It feels just like old times. Something about it causes Tommy's heart to ache.

He brings it up in his next session with Puffy.

"I went for a run with Techno," Tommy shares, and an odd wave of deja vu washes over him at the words.

"Yeah?" Puffy says, "glad you're still doing your runs."

"Me too," Tommy agrees. He hesitates and lets his head jerk up to the side. "It's just- I dunno it felt different."

"How did it feel different?" Puffy asks.

Tommy shrugs. Techno had been having a bad day, but that wasn't really why it felt weird. Techno's bad days were honestly something that was normal to Tommy, so while he felt for Techno, it wasn't... weird.

It felt off for a different reason.

"Well how did it make you feel?" Puffy asks.

"Hey! I dunno. Kinda sad? And frustrated? But I don't know why! I love going for runs with Techno!"

Puffy nods.

"I don't know, it felt different."

"Was there something different about it?"

"No!" Tommy insists, "that's the thing is that- that it was poggers- no I mean that- that it was- it was poggers. POGGERS pog HEY!" Tommy tics rapidly. He stops for a second, taking a breath before continuing, "It was totally normal. And like, nothing's been normal recently. I don't know why that felt off."

"Well could that maybe be it?" Puffy asks, "the fact that it was normal?"

Tommy thinks.

"I guess," he admits, "I dunno, I think I've just felt sort of left out recently with how chaotic things have been. And I know it's partially my fault, I've intentionally drawn away and redirected everyone so they paid less attention to me. I thought- I thought I didn't need it, y'know? That Ranboo needed it more."

Puffy nods. Tommy knows she gets it. They've talked about it before. They're working on it.

"Have you talked to Techno about feeling left out?" she asks.

Tommy shakes his head, and then it jerks up to the side.

“Maybe start there,” she suggests.

Which yeah, that’s probably a good idea, isn’t it?

“Tommy, can I steal you real quick?” Phil asks.

Tommy pops his head up from the controller, sharing a glance with Ranboo before shrugging and stumbling up the stairs towards Phil.

“Hey! Yeah?” he asks.

Phil invites him into his room, and Tommy goes, jumping onto his bed.

“So Ranboo’s case is a bit of a mess,” Phil says, “Which I’m sure you’ve noticed by now. But we’ve been making progress. And well, I think things are going to work out. So I wanted to ask you, are you okay with Niki coming over for a weekend some time? I know Ranboo wants to see her, and I think it would be nice to get to know her a bit.”

Tommy scrunches his eyebrows, and in return his nose scrunches up with a tic. His face relaxes, and he almost immediately scrunches his eyebrows again, this time involuntary. Guess he’s picking that up as another tic.

“Uh, is she going to be staying here?” Tommy asks. He doesn’t want to say no because he knows how much Ranboo would love seeing his sister again, but well, Tommy doesn’t know her. And honestly, he doesn’t really want a strange lady staying in his house. No matter if Ranboo vouches for her.

“No,” Phil says, “She’s staying at a hotel close by.”

That’s a bit better. Is that a bad thing for him to think that? But Phil says his opinions and feelings are just as important. So maybe it isn’t bad.

Maybe his thoughts can be his own, not good or bad. And maybe sometimes they conflict with other people’s thoughts, but that doesn’t mean it makes either of them right or wrong, but different.

“Uh, I think- pog, mate, Hey!- I think I’m okay with that. As long as I don’t have to spend time with her. I mean- I wanna meet her, I think that’d be cool. But I don’t want to have to spend time with her if I don’t want to. Is- women- that okay?”

“Totally fine,” Phil confirms.

And okay then, that’s alright to him.

Plus, Tommy does want to meet Niki. Ranboo talks about her all the time. To be fair, he does repeat a lot of the stories he shares but he lights up every time he tells them, so Tommy’s more than okay hearing him repeat them.

Tommy's favorite story about Niki is when she taught Ranboo how to make daisy chains. Ranboo had been pretty young, though he's not really sure how young he was. Ranboo couldn't quite remember. But pretty young. Niki had shown him how to use his nail to make a hole in the stem of a daisy, and then how he could take one and thread it through the other. She taught him how to tie the last two together, being extra gentle as not to rip it all apart. Ranboo tells him about failing to make one large enough to put on his head, messing up each time. He had cried, wanting a small crown to put on his head like Niki's.

Niki had giggled at him, taken the one she had made, and dropped it on his fluffy hair. Ranboo has gasped, going cross eyed to try and look at it. Niki had taken his broken one, and passed him more daisies, telling him to try again. She promised that one day he'd get it.

Tommy had asked him if he ever actually successfully made one. Ranboo replied that he didn't know, he didn't remember.

He explains that he remembered once, that he had remembered that day, but later didn't, and now only had an old memory book to go off of.

Tommy remembers frowning.

"Isn't that frustrating? Only remembering stuff you write down," he asks.

Ranboo shrugs.

"Yeah," he admits, "I guess. But on the other hand, I don't forget everything I write down. I remember more than that. I just write everything down because if I do end up forgetting, it's there.

"And I dunno, I guess other people could see it as a loss or frustrating. And sometimes it's like that for me too. But on the other hand I have pages and documents about my life that others don't. Maybe I can't actually remember that by myself, but I have all these recounts that others don't

"I mean really," Ranboo points out, "How much do you remember from when you were a little kid? Even if I didn't have memory issues, I might not have remembered that. I- I don't completely. But when I read what I wrote, it connects, it comes back and I get some of those same feelings, the setting, if not any real clear moments. A lot of people don't have that."

Tommy hadn't ever thought about it that way. He's seen Ranboo struggle and get frustrated with his memory loss, but he does have a point with this. He has journals full of memories, of moments that even people without memory issues would forget over time. It's kind of a cool collection to have.

"With my memory," Ranboo speaks up again, "It's- I mean- what a lot of people see as a tragedy, I see as a reality. And I don't really know how to grieve for what I never had, and never can conceptualize having. So," Ranboo shrugs, "I just kinda live my life, broken memory and all."

Tommy stares a bit. He's never heard Ranboo so well spoken.

So yeah, Tommy's excited to meet Niki.

But if Tommy's excited to meet Niki, Ranboo's ecstatic.

He talks about it nonstop the week leading up to her visit. The rest of them don't have the same amount of care, but they have care for Ranboo and it's incredible to see him so passionate about something.

Tommy wonders if you can have a special interest in an individual person, that's how much Ranboo seems to care. He's jumpy and excited and his hands flap and it's all amazing to see.

And then Niki's finally here. And the doorbell rings. And Ranboo goes pale.

He stares at the door, face going white.

Tommy almost laughs at his expression before realizing how utterly scared he is.

It's obvious once Tommy looks and notices the tapping of his fingers, how he bites his lip, how he's slightly tense.

"That's Niki," he says.

"Yeah," Phil agrees, "yeah, it is."

Ranboo stares at the door. Another knock rings out.

Ranboo takes a stumbling step forward, then all about runs for the door. He swings it open with a little too much first and stands face to face with Niki.

The first thing Tommy notices is how short she is compared to Ranboo. The second thing he notices is her smile.

He isn't really able to notice a third thing, because Niki pulls Ranboo close and he falls apart in her arms, instantly sobbing and blubbering as he holds her.

She whispers in his ear and he nods against her chest, practically on his knees in front of her. Tears glitter in her eyes as Ranboo's own continue to fall. He's definitely going to regret that later when the hives appear.

It's at that moment that Tommy's hate for the foster system continues to rise. Fuck whoever decided to separate these two.

Like he assumed, Niki is sickeningly nice, but she also has a sharp challenging edge that's fun to see.

Tommy doesn't get to talk to her a whole ton. Ranboo and her spend a lot of time just the two of them, out of the house. Tommy gets that. He'd want to spend all his time with Niki too if he was in Ranboo's situation.

They do have a nice dinner, all of them together. Ranboo glows the entire time, rambling and walking a mile a minute.

They spend that evening getting to know Niki, and she seems cool. She's nice and obviously loves Ranboo. She's fierce and strong and that's all great.

Wilbur seems to get along especially well with her. Tommy thinks he has the age advantage, they're at similar life stages so they have more to relate to each other about .

Tommy likes Niki but all but he feels a bit awkward around her. She's old enough to not be his age but young enough for there not to be too much of a generation gap, and honestly? Tommy doesn't really know how to talk to her?

Does he talk to her like he talks to Phil? Like a parent? After all she is hopefully going to be Ranboo's guardian.

Or does he talk to her like Wilbur? A figure to look up as an older sibling? After all she is Ranboo's sister.

Tommy doesn't really know, so it's a little awkward. But to be fair, he doesn't really have a chance or burning need to figure it out. So he lets it go, and the summer continues on.

And as the summer continues it brings so much with it.

Wilbur's like, properly pregnant now which is weird. He's recently had a craving for peanut butter and pickles which okay, Tommy can get behind that. But then he found out Wilbur meant them together. He noped out of there immediately.

It's weird knowing his brother is growing another human and weird knowing he's going to be an uncle. And like Wilbur is properly pregnant, has the round belly and the shit ton of vitamins and doctors appointments to go with it. As well as the various fruits that represent the baby's size. So many strange fruits.

And Tommy's maybe finally willing to admit that he's a bit jealous, a bit left out with what's all going on.

Part of that's his own fault, he's been intentionally pulling away. His family has attempted to draw him back in but he always chalked it up to be them doing it because they had to. Tommy thought he had been doing them a favor, keeping them out of the way.

But seeing the way Wilbur's face lights up when he asks him if he wants to go out to lunch with him, he's starting to think that assumption might be wrong.

"You want to spend time together?" Wilbur asks, "Just us?"

Tommy nods.

"Yeah," Wilbur says, "Of course."

Five minutes later they're in the car.

"I uh-" Tomy says, over their food, "Have kinda been jealous."

Wilbur looks up at him, attention fully given.

"You have?"

Tommy nods.

"There's just been a lot of change, y'know? And I mean Ranboo and Phil have been busy figuring out how to get Ranboo back to Niki and Techno's doing his own thing and now you're having a fucking baby and all of you are so busy and I don't want to intrude and soon enough, y'know you're not going to need a- hey!- a kid brother because you'll have the baby and..."

Tommy ends it all with a shrug.

Wilbur practically melts.

"Y'know there isn't a cap on my love," he says.

Tommy shrugs.

"Tommy, I love this motherfucking fetus more than I have ever loved anything in my entire life."

Tommy instantly shrinks.

"And I thought the same about my parents," Wilbur confesses, "and my aunt and uncle. And Phil, and Techno, and Ranboo, and you, and one time I felt the same way about a puppy I saw at the dog park."

Okay. So Wilbur loves lots of shit. So what?

"My point, Tommy, is- look love can't be measured, y'know? It's infinite. I love you to pieces and I love this fetus to pieces but... but they're different types of love."

"It's like, like look, this baby is my child. It's someone I'll raise, someone who I'm responsible for. You're my little brother, my partner in crime and an absolute little shit that I could never get rid of."

"I can't- I can't choose between them," Wilbur says, "I love you both unconditionally, in different ways. That's just how it is."

Wilbur finishes his short mini speech about love and immediately bursts into tears. Tommy, who had previously been gaping open mouthed at the touching speech, immediately panics.

"Uh, Wilbur," Tommy asks, because Wilbur's still crying. Tears stream down his face and if they weren't already parked, waiting to get out, Tommy would be worried about his driving ability.

Not knowing what to do, Tommy cautiously lifts a hand to place on Wilbur's back. He begins to rub it soothingly.

Wilbur's just... crying. Plain crying. He's not... panicking. The crying doesn't make sense and he's not panicking so Tommy doesn't know what to do, how to fix it.

"Sorry, sorry," Wilbur huffs, brushing away all the tears that continue to fall. "It's just-fucking hormones man."

Tommy's building panic cuts itself off at the source. Pure relief that something more isn't wrong floods through him.

He lets out a giggle and then another, and then suddenly he's full blown laughing. Seconds later, Wilbur joins in, tears still falling as they stumble into hysterics.

They don't stop laughing for another ten minutes. Wilbur's crying only stops shortly before the laughter does.

"Thanks," Tommy says eventually, when they've both calmed down.

Wilbur looks at him, narrowing his eyes, seemingly not as ready to let this go.

Tommy huffs and nods.

"I-" he stumbles on his words, "I just, don't want to be a nuisance?"

"Why not?" Wilbur says.

Tommy splutters.

"What, you're not going to argue that I'm not a nuisance?"

"No," Wilbur agrees. Abd okay ouch that hurts a little. "I mean I could. Cause like, obviously it's not true. You aren't a nuisance. But I really doubt that talking to me is going to change your mind. That's something to hash out with Puffy."

"So, I'll repeat. Why don't you want to be a nuisance?"

Tommy scrambles for an answer.

"Well because," he stutters, "because uhm. Well if I'm a nuisance I'll annoy you and then you won't love me anymore."

"What happens if I don't love you anymore?"

Tommy pales. Wilbur's really not holding back at all, is he.

"Well," Tommy says, "I mean. Well if you don't love me then like- what am I doing here, right? Like if you don't love me and I don't serve a purpose, then... then why haven't you left me? Why haven't you sent me away?"

Oh. So this is what this is about.

Wilbur gives him a look.

"Goddamit," Tommy mutters, "why the fuck does everything boil back down to being alone?"

Wilbur gives a small smile. It isn't a happy one.

"That's kinda how trauma works, Tommy."

Tommy shrugs.

"You and Techno seem to have it out together so well."

Wilbur snorts.

"That's a fucking load of shit," he insists, "you've seen first hand my panic attacks and breakdowns. And god- you have no idea how many times I've called Phil in the middle of the night barely able to breathe. Technop- Techno to he's been through so much and he still struggles with his emotions around his parents. Tommy trauma is shit and it's hard and it doesn't go away in a year or two."

"Honestly it doesn't ever really go away. But it's okay, because you learn to recognize it, catch when it arises and cope in the moment. And you grow stronger and more resistant and things, Tommy things are okay and you are loved and you can have a good life. You can have trauma- be traumatized, and still live a wonderful, meaningful life full of purpose. You can have good things, you can have a good life," Wilbur's voice hitches on the last few words and he breaks into another round of sobs.

Tommy maybe joins this time. Just maybe.

"God fucking hormones," Wilbur whines, "you know I have lightning bolts on my thighs now?"

"You have what?" Tommy asks. When the fuck did pregnancy and lightning bolts go together?

"Mhmm," Wilbur says, "buncha stretch marks. They look like lightning. Cool as fuck."

"Damn. Why can't I be- nope nevermind," Tommy quickly nails his line of thought, mouth again ahead of his brain. At least he caught himself this time.

Wilbur wheezes anyway at the answer. Tommy narrows his eyes well naturally.

"Fuck off," he complains.

Wilbur's laughs slowly die down.

"We good?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy nods, "We're good."

Two down, just a little bit left to go.

"Heard we're having heart to hearts," Techno says, standing in his doorway a little less than a week later.

Tommy nods and invites him in. Techno steps over the threshold and takes Tommy's chair. He uses a foot on the ground to shake him back and forth slightly, humming with the movement.

"I care about you, y'know?" Techno says.

"I know," Tommy says, "I just..."

Shit how does she do this? You think it would get easier, but it doesn't.

"The other week," Tommy notes abruptly, "you asked Ranboo to garden with you. And not me."

"Yeah," Techno agrees. He doesn't elaborate. Tommy waits for an answer and doesn't get one. He's a bit hurt for a moment, feels dismissed, before he has the realization that he didn't ask a direct enough question for Techno to understand. Tommy clarifies.

"I- why?" Tommy asks, "Cause like, it hurts. I felt left out. Hey! We always used to do that together."

Techno frowns.

"I know," he agrees, "but you always hated it. So I invited Ranboo instead. Because I know you don't like gardening."

That is... very true.

"I don't," Tommy agrees, "but, uh. I do like- women POGGERS- spending time with you," he admits.

Techno stills for a second, before spinning once fully in the chair. He does it again. And then again.

"Okay wait shit sorry, focus," Techno mumbles. He pulls himself back to Tommy.

"I'm sorry," he says, "I wasn't trying to exclude you or make you upset. I was actually trying to do the opposite."

And hell, how can Tommy stay mad when Techno was literally just trying to be nice to him.

"Maybe," Techno says, "I mean I know I'm only here for another week."

Right. School starts again soon. Fuck that. And damn Technos going all the way back to California. That's so far.

"But, we could find something else to do together? Or we can garden," Techno tacks on hastily, "if that's what you want to do. But if it's just spending time together... we can do that in other ways y'know. You just have to ask."

He just has to ask. He needs to stop pulling away.

Tommy can commit to that.

"Fair enough," he agrees, "want to do something together now?"

Techno frowns.

"I'm kinda done with peopleing," he admits, "emotions are..." he trails off with a shake of his head. "Not really in a place to hang out, but we can watch a show together or something if you want. I'd like that."

"That sounds perfect," Tommy agrees, "The Office."

Tommy pops his lips with a tic.

"The offices," Techno agrees, and off they go.

A week later Techno leaves for California once more. And it sucks. But hey, they have phones and they keep in touch. It's back to weekly calls. Tommy will get used to it again.

A week after Techno heads back to college, Tommy and Ranboo's senior year starts up and fuck has school always been this miserable?

Jeez, how much homework can teachers assign in the first week? I mean, really? At least he had history with Tubbo again. One last hurrah to good times. Still no classes with Ranboo though.

He falls back into the same routine. Wake up early, school. Grab the bus and head home.

Luckily, the second weekend back to school, Tommy, Tubbo, and Ranboo find some free time and head to an amusement park. Tommy and Ranboo had been begging Phil to go for almost a month now.

Phil was okay with it, but he wasn't sure he was okay with them going alone. Eventually, he accepted that they were growing up and doing their own things and relented, making them promise to check in occasionally.

Ranboo and Tommy fervently promised.

So here they were, standing at the front gates. Tommy was doing little toe hops, ecstatic for the day to come. Tubbo was grinning maniacally, and Ranboo- who had been apprehensive about the crowds- was doing small hand flaps.

It was going to be a great day.

And it was!

Tommy knew Tubbo wasn't a huge rollercoaster fan (which was why he was surprised Tubbo had been so excited to go). But Tommy hadn't known that Ranboo was a roller coaster fanatic. Ranboo who was usually an awkward mess ranging from shy to giggly to sly was suddenly standing straight up to his full height, jumping around, and extraordinarily confident. If Tommy didn't know better, he'd say this was a different person. Hell, Tommy knew better and he still wasn't convinced it wasn't a different person.

His joy and excitement was infectious and Tommy found himself feeding off of Ranboo's adrenaline as they went on ride after ride. In almost every line they'd have a battle with Tubbo who would staunchly refuse and then almost certainly cave when they were pretty much next in line for whatever crazy contraption Ranboo had picked out this time.

It had gotten a little overwhelming a bit back, so they had taken a short break.

To the best of Tommy's guess, Ranboo had gotten so excited, having so much fun that it had become overwhelming, this oppressive force of excess energy he didn't know what to do with. In addition to the overwhelming stimuli of the park- he had reached the tipping point of sensory overload and a resulting meltdown.

They found a shady corner as Ranboo whined and stimmed frantically, trying to cope with it all. He had been fine after a few minutes, if a bit tired, so they carried on with their day.

Quickly, the excitement returned. They were in line for the next ride, near the front, when Ranboo went absolutely still.

Considering he had just been happily chattering and not so subtly stimming, it came as a surprise to see him so still and silent.

"My memory book's gone," he says, before unfreezing and looking desperately around. He looks around the floor, and then uses his height to peer around as if it'll somehow magically appear.

"It was in your bag?" Tommy points out. His lips pop.

"What?" Tubbo asks. And he says it in that way that Tommy's learning to mean that he didn't fully hear something and needs it repeated. He turns to face Tubbo.

"Ranboo can't find his memory book, I told him it was in his bag."

"I know it was in my bag!" Ranboo hisses, "But I don't have my bag!"

It's then Tommy realizes the small bag Ranboo has been carrying all day is nowhere to be found.

"Oh."

“Yeah, oh,” Ranboo hisses.

“It’s probably at the last ride,” Tubbo points out, “We had to set our bags down for that one in those cubbies, yeah? Did you leave it there?”

Ranboo’s hands reach up to grasp and pull at his hair.

“I don’t know,” he says, “I don’t remember. Uh, which ride was that?”

“The red hanging coaster,” Tommy reminds. His nose wrinkles up.

Ranboo shakes his head.

“I don’t know,” he says, “All the cubbies- all of them are practically the same and it’s just like an automatic thing- I don’t know, I don’t remember.”

“Okay,” Tubbo soothes, obviously realizing how wound up Ranboo’s getting. Ranboo continues to pull at his hair. Tommy’s worried if he keeps doing it, it’s going to start hurting. “Well I’m pretty sure you put your bag there, so that’s probably where you left it,” Tubbo encourages.

“We can go grab it after this ride,” Tommy adds. They’re a few spots away from the front and then they’ll be out of line. They can swing by the last coaster and pick it up. And if it’s not there, they can slowly make their way back, ride to ride until they find it.

“No,” Ranboo says, “No we have to- I need it.”

“I get it,” Tommy soothes, “So we’ll go-”

“No!” Ranboos shouts, briefly attracting the attention of the people that surround them. Luckily shouting isn’t unheard of at an amusement park, and the majority of them lose interest. “No!” he insists, “No you don’t get it! You can’t get it! And I need it and I don’t remember and it might not even be there and I- I have to have it and I don’t.”

Tommy’s not quite sure where the outburst came from, Ranboo never yells like this, but he goes to damage control fast. First things first, Ranboo needs to breathe. Hyperventilating isn’t going to solve this.

“Whatever you say bossman,” Tubbo easily agrees. Tommy nods.

“Let’s start by breathing,” Tommy suggests, and together they inhale. They get through a short breathing exercise and Ranboo’s breath stabilizes.

“I- we- I need-” Ranboo huffs softly kicks the ground. He’s obviously struggling to communicate what he needs. Tommy wishes he could help, but he doesn’t know how.

“I need to find it now,” he eventually says, “I don’t- not after this ride. Now.”

“Okay,” Tommy immediately agrees. If that’s what Ranboo needs, that’s what they’ll do. They start looking for a way to exit the line, and bail the moment they’re able.

They make it to the previous coaster in record time, approaching from the back and flagging down a worker with the explanation that they left a bag. She lets them in, and they race over to the cubbies. Ranboo's purple backpack is easy to find, in the top row.

Ranboo grabs it lightning fast before tearing it open and inspecting its contents. Moments later, the tension in his shoulders release, and Tommy knows he's found what he's looking for. His memory book's okay then. Good. Tommy really didn't want to find out what would happen if it hadn't been.

Ranboo turns to the two of them.

"Thanks," he says.

"No problem."

"Of course," Tommy agrees.

It's a small blip on their good day and before long they're back in line for another ride. They're not going to let the small moment of panic ruin what's turning out to be a great time.

Phil picks them up at closing hours later that evening, and Tommy can confidently say it's the best day he's had in a long time. He wakes up to Phil carefully unbuckling his seatbelt, and whispering a quiet 'we're home,' what seems like only moments later.

He groans and then stumbles upstairs to his bed, and instantly falls asleep.

Of course this means two days later when he has to go back to school, he's absolutely miserable.

Soon enough he's standing in front of the front door on the second day of week three of school- only four days after their amusement park excursion. Ranboo's right behind him as always, and Tommy lazily pushes the door open.

"Ranboo," Phil says the moment Tommy and Ranboo step through the door. "Your papers went through."

Chapter End Notes

Most goals for foster placements aren't adoption. This doesn't make those homes any less important, or any less meaningful.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[**Encompass Sandbox Project:**](#) The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

leaving home, going home

Chapter Summary

Ranboo begins his journey home. The rest of the family adjusts.

Chapter Notes

CW: tics, tic attack, jealousy, memory issues, self worth issues, gender dysphoria,

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Two weeks. Two weeks until Ranboo goes home to Niki.

It's a good thing, it is.

So why is Tommy so upset about this?

It's- it's what Ranboo wants, what Ranboo needs. It's usually impossible to get both those things! Tommy should be happy for him.

And he is! He is happy for him!

It's just... well Tommy's gonna miss him..

God it would be so much easier to hate him, wouldn't it?

Tommy could have taken the easy route. He could have said no when Phil asked him about fostering another kid. Tommy could have told Ranboo to stay away from his friends, or hated him instead. He could have not talked to Ranboo at all, or been a dick this entire time. He could have ignored him.

It would have been easier.

But no, instead Tommy tried to be friends with him, messed up a bunch, and then got jealous of him instead.

And he still wants to be Ranboo's friend.

Fuck this man, why do brains have to be jerks? Tommy just wants to not stress over things.

But Ranboo's leaving, so he doesn't really have time to wait.

"Hey! I'm sorry," Tommy says, when they're walking back from the park one day. His head lifts up, jerking to the side. It's been doing that fairly consistently for most of today. Tommy thinks it's the nerves. His neck is starting to get sore.

Ranboo frowns, and looks down, eyes hitting Tommys eyebrows.

"What for?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy heaves a sigh and reflects on the last few months.

"Being a jerk, getting jealous over you and shit. I should have been better."

Ranboo comes to a stop. Tommy winces. He probably should have expected he wouldn't get an apology that easily. He should have done this at home, asked Ranboo to sit down with him.

"You are- were- jealous of me?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy blinks.

"Yeah, dude, of course," he exclaims, "Man you instantly got along with Tubbo and Phil loves you. Wilbur and you bond over writing and storytelling and Techno loves having someone to tend the garden with him, not to mention an autie buddy. You're- pog, hey!- smarter than me, you do way better in school. You're tall and you're talented and, I mean come on really, Ranboo what isn't there to be jealous over?"

Ranboo continues to stare.

It's a bit awkward because they're standing still in the middle of a sidewalk, but no one else is around so at least they aren't really blocking the path.

"You're jealous of me?" Ranboo repeats.

"Yes," Tommy admis.

"Oh."

Ranboo counties walking. Tommy races to catch up.

"Oh?" he demands.

"Yeah," Ranboo agrees, "oh."

"What does 'oh' mean?"

Ranboo shrugs.

"I guess- I never really noticed? To be completely honest I was kind of jealous of you too. You had- I mean you had this perfect family, perfect life it seemed like," Ranboo admits, "I felt a little like an imposter. You seemed, so comfortable."

"Imposter is sus," Tommy mutters, "but yeah, I mean I guess I am now, but you should have seen me two years ago. And I- uh I still struggle. Like a lot. Just so you know."

Ranboo gives him a small smile. Tommy finds him returning it, even as his nose wrinkles up. They walk in silence for a bit longer.

"Uh, and what did you mean by being a jerk?" Ranboo asks.

"Y'know, like when we first met and I was insensitive about your memory issues. And then when you took care of Michael I was an ass about it. Not to mention stealing Techno from you while gardening. Stuff like that."

"... So uh... speaking of my memory issues," Ranboo starts, a smile twitching across his lips.

Tommy bursts into laughter. Ranboo joins in with his own giggles.

"I don't remember the first," he says honestly, "but dude, the other two weren't you being a jerk? I mean sure you were a bit rude with Michael but he was a screaming lump of plastic. I don't blame you. And Techno- I mean we were all hanging out. You weren't... stealing him," Ranboo pauses, shrugging, "I don't really see how you were a jerk. But hey if you were-forgiven."

"Just like that?" Tommy asks.

"Just like that," Ranboo agrees.

This was going a lot easier than Tommy thought. He's glad he brought this up before Ranboo leaves.

Especially because before he knows it, it's the week before Ranboo leaves.

Wilbur's over, and together the three of them set to packing up Ranboo's stuff. He still doesn't have a whole lot, there's only so many things you can accumulate in a few months, especially when you start with practically nothing, but it's also way more than what Ranboo began with.

And while it isn't a whole ton, it's definitely going to take a little while to get it packed. It isn't nearly as bad as when Wil and Techno moved out.

They set aside all of Saturday and Sunday for it, taking things slow, hanging and reflecting as they take regular breaks from the minimal work.

But they're back at it after lunch, packing most of Ranboo's clothes up in a box. They make quick work of it, Wil taking things off of hangers and Ranboo folding them before placing them in boxes as Tommy works on transferring things from the dresser.

"You have a lot of Hawaiian print shirts," tommy notes as he drops a pair of pants into the box.

"Yes," Ranboo agrees, "I do. Because they're cool."

Tommy nods. Of course.

"Holy shit!" Wilbur screeches.

Tommy startles slightly, turning towards his older brother. Ranboo's reaction is a lot more extreme. He jumps at the noise, falling back and barely managing to not fall into one of the new boxes.

"Ranboo!" Wilbur says, "oh my gosh I'm sorry."

Ranboo picks himself up, looking slightly dazed. He bounces on his feet a bit and shakes out one of his hands.

"It's fine," he says, "I'm okay."

Tommy gives him a once over, and nods, before turning back to Wil.

"Oh right," Wil says, "Fungi kicked."

Tommy groans.

"You've got to stop calling him that," he complains, "Little dudes going to think his uncle's an idiot."

"His uncle is an idiot," Wil agrees.

"Fun guy, fungi, same thing," Tommy dismisses, "I misheard, let it go."

"No."

"Fungi-"

Tommy groans. Really Ranboo too?

*-kicked?" Ranboo asks, "like kicked kicked?"

Tommy head shoots up. He'd been so focused on the bad nickname that he had completely not processed that part.

"No- hey! mate- way," Tommy says, as Wil nods and beckons them both closer. He had them both place their hands on his stomach and wait.

And then, just a moment later, a soft jab meets Tommy's hand.

"Woah. It's like a scifi movie."

Ranboo and Wilbur both look at him, before turning to each other and immediately burst into laughter. Tommy blushes as he realizes how dumb his comment was and stumbles through an explanation. Ranboo and Wil have none of it.

Ultimately, they're loud enough that Phil sticks his head on and raises an eyebrow at the three of them.

"Dad!" Wilbur perks up when he sees Phil. "Dad fungi kicked!"

"They did?" Phil asks.

Wil nods and beckons Phil to the room. Tommy's head jerks up to the side. He pops his lips.

Phil navigates the mess of a half packed room and goes to Wil's side.

"Can I?" Phil asks, gesturing at Wil's belly, and Wilbur nods.

Tommy's surprised how open he's being with touching. Wilbur's always been a tactile person, but Tommy knows his dysphoria has increased since stopping hormones for the pregnancy and since his body has changed. He's fine talking about his body, but Tommy knows he doesn't love how it feels.

Phil places a gentle hand on Wil's stomach, and waits. And waits. And waits. And waits.

Wilbur shrugs and Phil takes his hand away.

"Guess he's done," Wil says.

Phil grumbles.

"He just doesn't like his grandfather," he pouts.

Wil snorts.

"Yeah sure, that's it," he says sarcastically.

Phil rolls his eyes and then surveys the room.

"So how's packing going?" he asks.

He gets a chorus of positives and gives a slight nod, before turning to Ranboo.

"Ranboo," he said softly, "can I steal you for a moment?"

Oh. Oh Tommy knows what's this is for. Wilbur and him exchange a look.

Ranboo's eyes widen slightly but he squeaks out a 'sure' and ducks out of the room.

Wil and Tommy watch him go. Guess it's time then.

Ranboo may not be staying with them, he may not be getting adopted but he's still part of the family. Ranboo's a piece of their puzzle and he's going to where he needs to be, but he'll always belong here with them as well.

Ranboo's a part of their family. He couldn't possibly tear away from those emotional bonds, even if he is physically moving on.

And of course like each of them before him, Ranboo's getting an adoption present. In his case, it happens to be more of a 'thanks for letting me foster you' present.

"Do you think he'll like it?" Tommy asks. He pops his lips.

"Of course," Wil scoffs, "Dad's good at this stuff. And he talked to Niki and all of us about it. We all agreed it's what's right."

"It's a balance," Tommy agrees, "kinda like your scrapbook, yeah?"

Wil nods.

"I hadn't really made that connection before," he notes, "but yeah, it is, isn't it. I like that his is easier to carry with him. It suits him well."

"Versus you're giant book that has a firm, stable home?" Tommy asks, extending the metaphor.

"Yeah," Wilbur agrees.

They start to pack again. They finish the clothes without Ranboo. In fact Ranboo doesn't come back until a fair bit later, and when he does he's still brushing tears out of his eyes.

"Be careful," Phil frets.

"I'm okay," Ranboo says, even though Tommy can already see the hives. He scoots to the side table by his bed and pulls out his box of meds. "I'm taking them, see?"

Phil gives a sigh that's just- so Phil. It's a little exasperated, but mostly worried.

"You're the one who made me cry," Ranboo argues.

"I didn't mean to!" Phil says.

All three of the others turn to stare at him. Come on, Phil's done this four times now. He's got to expect crying by this point.

"What!" he protests.

Ranboo just shakes his head.

The movement causes something silver to peak out by his neck, glinting slightly in the lighting.

Tommy smiles at the sight.

"Can we see the finished product?" he asks, "Wil and I never got to see. Phil wanted you to see it first."

"You knew?" Ranboo asks.

"Yup," Wil confirms, "helped choose the photos and everything.*

Ranboo snorts.

"Course you knew," he grumbles. But there's no heat behind it and he lifts his hands to pull out the necklace under his shirt. He lays it flat on his chest before picking up the heart locket at the end. He holds it up to them

The front is fairly simple, silver with slight swirling detail to give it a bit of flair.

Ranboo then turns it, fiddles with the clasp, and opens it. He presents the middle out to them. On the right is one of the pictures of all of them, where Phil set up a camera and got in frame with them all. It's from summer, when Techno and Ranboo were both here. And it's the one with the added addition of Tubbo, which makes it all the better.

It's a small photo, crammed in the constraints of the locket, but each of them can be identified.

And on the other side.

Oh. Oh Tommy didn't know Phil was able to pull it off.

There's a young girl- preteens- holding a child. The girls hair is a striking white blonde, the boy's a blond that will eventually turn brown. Neither of them look at the camera.

The girl looks down, devoted to her baby brother. The boy looks up, in awe of his big sister.

Things... Well things worked out, didn't they.

It's a cute photo of Niki and Ranboo. Tommy has no idea how Phil was able to get his hands on it.

Ranboo closes it gently after a minute, and then slowly flips it over, presenting the back.

It's quite similar to the front, but has even less detailing, just a simple border. It works well considering the fancy cursive lettering scrawled in the middle.

'Beloved' it reads.

It fits Ranboo well.

Beloved indeed.

God Tommy's going to miss him. He says as much to Puffy.

"I'm glad he's going home," Tommy says, "but I kinda wish he'd stay, y'know? Is that wrong?"

"Tommy," Puffy says, "your feelings aren't wrong."

"I get it," Tommy says, "my feelings are valid yada yada yada but I mean Ranboo's are more important."

He immediately realizes what he says and tries to quickly backtrack.

"I mean like, they're more important in this case- or not more important but obviously they hold more weight, because it's Ranboo's life, y'know?" Tommy rushes to defend.

"Do you believe that or are you trying to convince me that you believe that," Puffy asks.

Tommy sighs.

"I know we're working on it," he says, "but I just- I guess I don't- I'm not used to my feelings being important," Tommy shrugs. "I've started getting used to living with Phil, but that's also when my feelings haven't been in conflict with others. And now- now with Ranboo showing up they have been."

"It's hard to... I don't know. I guess it's hard to acknowledge my own feelings when they conflict with others. They just seem less important."

"Tommy, you aren't less important," Puffy reminds him.

"I didn't say that," Tommy huffs.

"Didn't you?"

Fair enough.

"I- I don't know if I believe that," Tommy admits. He's quiet, looking down at the ground, "but I think... I think I want to try. To believe that."

He looks up, being greeted with Puffy's blinding smile.

"Good," she says, "that's what I was hoping to hear."

They continue on for a bit and when Phil picks him up, he's absolutely emotionally shredded.

He trudges into the car, curls up against the door and goes quiet.

"Hey," Phil says, "I'm here." He reaches out, puts his hand on Tommy's shoulder and rubs smoothing circles into his back.

Tommy melts into his embrace.

This is nice.

He almost falls asleep on the car ride home, only forcing himself to stay awake because he knows who'll be on the other side.\ when he gets there.

Phils trying not to laugh at how he struggles to stay up, and Tommy ever so kindly flips him off.

But finally they're home, and hoping out of the car has him waking up a bit more.

When he opens that door, he's greeted with Techno sitting on the couch with Wil.

"Techno!" Tommy says, racing forward.

Techno looks up, gives him a raised eyebrow, and then immediately looks away.

"You look like you're about to cry," Techno mentions. "And not in a good way."

"Already did," Tommy admits, "therapy."

"Ah," Techno says, "Therapy sucks."

"Tell me about it," Wil grumbles, shuffling a bit further into the couch as if in hopes that it will swallow him whole.

He's been grumbly all day and Tommy's starting to wonder if it's more than hormones.

Phil chuckles, walking over to Wil and combing a hand through his hair. Wil grabs a couch pillow and presses it over his chest.

"I'm actually going back to therapy," Phil tells them.

All three of them turn to look at him.

"You are?" Wil asks, speaking for all of them.

Phil nods as he continues to pet Wil's hair.

"There's been a lot of changes this year," Phil says, "and I want to do my best to support all of you and myself. We'll see how it goes."

"I'm proud of you Dad," Techno admits.

"Thank you," Phil says.

"Pog," Tommy replies, not knowing what she to say. And god, now that he's said it he's triggered his tics. "Pog- THAT'S POGGERS- pog mate. Women! Hi! Just... just killed a woman!" Tommy's eyes widen, immediately horrified, "Jesus Christ," he says, "I swear if this is a new fucking tic I- just... just killed! Just killed a woman, feeling good!"

Fuck.

Fuck this. He hates this Jesus Christ. He doesn't want to get used to this, to accept this, he doesn't want to say that!

"I swear- pog, just killed a woman, feeling good. Just killed a woman feeling good."

And now that he's started he can't stop and all he wants is to stop but he keeps repeating that phrase over and over and over.

"Just killed a woman, feeling good," he snaps again, in that upbeat voice that he hates.

He goes on, head twitches, scrunching nose, and eye blinking throwing itself into the mix. Lovely.

"Tommy," Phil says gently once he's been standing there for a few minutes ticcing repeatedly. Tears have started to drip down his cheeks, accelerated by the excessive blinking.

"Just killed a woman, feeling good!" Tommy says again.

"Tommy, do you think we can have you sit down on the couch"

Tommy nods with a tic. Which sucks because he does actually want to. He wants to say yes but he can't.

"Hey! Mate! Just killed a woman!" He shouts.

Eventually around all the stumbling words he gets out an okay to Phil.

Phil helps guide him over to the couch, Wil moves to sit instead of laying across it to make room for Tommy.

Tommy takes his seat, vocal tics continuing to pop out without control and hating this entire thing. He's given up trying to stop them even though he wants nothing more.

And then, thankful they do.

Tommy belatedly thinks to be careful what he wishes for, because they cut off due to a series of sharp inhales that he has no intention of making. And then he makes the sharp inhales again.

And oh goddamit he has a fucking breathing tic now?

Things carry on like that for a while, Tommy ticcing uncontrollably and hating things.

What seems like forever later, they do start to slow. Tommy doesn't have to focus as much attention on them now and he very quickly realizes that his entire family is watching him. He groans and buries his head into Wilbur's thigh.

Wilbur's hand quickly comes to his hair and Tommy stays there for a few minutes. Wilbur smells nice, sweeter than normal and he enjoys the sensation.

Eventually, Tommy pulls his head up once more. Now it's just him and Wilbur.

"Hey," Wil says, "good to see your face."

"I hated that," Tommy complains, and then goes to fling his arms around his brother, looking for comfort, but Wilbur flinches back minutely.

Tommy frowns.

"Sorry," Will immediately apologizes, "Sorry you can hug me."

Tommy frowns, "I don't want to if you don't want me to."

"No it's fine," Wil insists, and something about it has Tommy on edge. He raises an eyebrow at his older brother.

"Sorry," Wil says again, "sorry- it's just... been struggling with body shit this week. Really don't want people touching me, reminding me, really don't even want to have a body to begin with this week."

Tommy looks at him. Notices Wil's fidgeting posture and remembering the pillow he had pressed up against his chest earlier.

"How's hand holding sound?" Tommy asks. His nose wrinkles up and his head tips up to the side.

Wil offers his hand out, and Tommy takes it. It's a small point of contact, but it's there and it makes Tommy feel better as Wilbur slowly rubs circles into the back of his hand.

"How are you doing?" Wil asks, "Phil and Tech left to give you some space, but I can grab them if you want them."

"No it's okay," Tommy says quickly. He's already- look he already hates this new tic and is going to adjust to having it, will have to work on validating and reminding himself that it's not his fault, but something uncontrollable.

He'd rather just be mostly alone right now. So he lays in Wilbur's lap, and lets time pass by. And Ranboo's last week at the house carries forward.

"I'm going to miss this place," Ranboo mentions on one of his last evenings.

Tommy stares at him, scrunching his eyebrows.

"What do you mean?" Tubbo asks at his side, sprawled out on the grass. Tommy chose to be dignified and sit leaning against the tree, hands in the grass and slowly pulling out pieces to shred them before starting again.

Ranboo shrugs from where he sits on the grass as well.

"I've gotten used to it, y'know?" he says, "I usually try not to get too settled. It just makes leaving harder."

Tommy nods. He's been there. It's so much harder leaving once you've gotten attached. Better not to form an emotional attachment at all.

Tubbo frowns.

"That's kinda sad," he observes.

"Yeah," Ranboo signs, looking up at the sky, "it kind of is."

Tommy has been with Phil three years now, but he spent much longer than a few years in the foster system. It is sad. It sucks.

He squeezes his eyes shut, overcome with a wave of grief he doesn't quite understand.

"Hey, I think that cloud kinda looks like an evil clown with an axe," Tubbo notes, pointing up at the sky, "looks like the type to kill some kids."

Instantly, Tommy forgets his thoughts.

"Tubbo, what the fuck?" He mumbles.

"No, no, no," Ranboo insists, "it's obviously a feral rabbit man holding a carrot. See?"

Ranboo gestures towards the sky and Tommy wonders what the fuck his friends are on.

He's going to miss this- and hey wait, that's what they had been talking about.

"What do you mean you're going to miss this place," Tommy insists.

"When I leave," Ranboo says, "in just a few days. C'mon Tommy, I thought I was the one with memory problems."

Tommy rolls his eyes.

"No, I get it, yeah you're leaving us for Niki."

Rnaboo turns towards him quickly, face dropping, the hurt on it ever so apparent.

"I'm joking," Tommy insists quickly, because he really was. Ranboo must not have caught the tonal shift and Tommy does his best to quickly clarify.

Ranboo realizes immensely.

"So you're leaving us- slash j- for Niki," Tommy says, "but you're acting like you're never going to visit."

Ranboo creases his eyebrows together, frowns, and then looks back up at Tommy.

"I can visit?" He asks

"Of course," Tommy insists.

"You better," Tubbo adds.

"Oh," Ranboo says, turning back to the sky, "I hadn't thought about that."

"You better not forget about us," Tommy insists, voice suddenly small as he realizes the likeliness that could happen. He doest think Ranboo's the type to do that, but distance makes

things hard and Tommy is more than familiar with losing friends when you get thrown around the system like a ragdoll.

He doesn't want that to happen to their little trio.

"I won't," Ranboo promises.

Tommy nods, smiles, and leans back against the tree trunk, enjoying the late afternoon sun.

"You better not forget us," Tubbo tells him, "cause if you do I'll hunt you down and- and evesigate you."

"Evesigate?" Ranboo asks, tone mild and even, unfazed by Tubbo's antics.

"Yeah, y'know, take all your guts and organs and stuff."

"I think you mean eviscerate Big Man," Tommy chimes in.

Tubbo brightens.

"Yeah," he insists, "that!"

Ranboo pales, if that's possible considering how white he already is to begin with.

"Please don't."

"Then don't forget about us," Tommy insists.

And hey, c'mon, that's a fair deal, right? Tommy thinks so.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter. But before we head there, I want to take a minute to discuss what'll be happening with this series.

Everything I write has intent. I won't be dragging this series out needlessly. That said, it's far from over.

The next fic will focus on Phil. It is already mostly finished. It'll be shorter, and may be a lengthy oneshot or split into a few chapters.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

Phil gets his time to shine next. He will not be the last.

Title reveal and further info will come at the end of the final locket chapter.

an ocean of us

Chapter Summary

Ranboo goes home. Things are good.

Chapter Notes

CW: gender dysphoria, discussion of unplanned pregnancy, memory loss/issues, worry of losing friends, near meltdown, mention of canibalism (as a joke)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy confronts Tubbo the day before the day Ranboo moves out.

“Hey,” Tommy mutters, “uh, do you think we could- hey! You alright mate?- could talk?”

Tubbo frowns at him.

“Can you repeat that?” he asks, slightly hesitant as if he’s unsure of himself.

“Yeah,” Tommy says, and then does, trying not to mutter this time.

“Oh, yeah,” Tubbo says, “Sure. What about? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, course,” Tommy responds instantly, but then pauses, “Or… I guess, not really?”

Tubbo tilts his head at him. He pauses their game.

“Uh yeah?” he asks, “What's up?”

Fuck how did Tommy get so lucky to have a friend like Tubbo who instantly supports him and listens to him. Tubbo paused what he was doing immediately just to care for Tommy.

Tommy hesitates and tries to consider how to say what he wants without upsetting or offending Tubbo.

“I just-” he starts. He huffs, and decides to just go for it, “Why’d you talk to Ranboo about your hearing loss first?”

Tubbo scrunches his eyebrows at him.

"Dude, that was months ago."

"I know," Tommy stresses, "That's why it doesn't make sense to me. Like you- we're best friends. And- POGGERS! Women- sure you were friends with Ranboo at that point but you couldn't have known him that well. So how could you- hey- tell him before me? Why- why'd you trust him more? Did I do something wrong?"

Tubbo's face falls.

"No, no, Tommy of course not," Tubbo soothes, "That's not it at all."

Tommy slumps, more than slightly relieved, even if he still doesn't have his question answered. Tubbo says that and Tommy believes it, but he still doesn't get it. His head jerks up and to the side and his lips pop.

"Well then, why?" Tommy asks.

It's Tubbo's turn to hesitate.

"I-" Tubbo starts, "well... truthfully Tommy? It wasn't really about you at all."

Tommy frowns.

"It's," Tubbo pauses once more, "It's- I was dealing with this whole new thing that I had never been through before and I didn't know anyone else who had and I felt really alone and I didn't know what to do. So... I guess I could have told you. And I thought about it. But I was scared because I didn't know how you would react. Ranboo was safer to tell. If he got upset with me, well then I'd lose a friend I hadn't known for that long. But if I lost you- Tommy you're my best friend. I could risk that."

"So yeah Tommy, I know I could have told you and maybe I should have. But honestly- it wasn't really about you. It was about me and if I was ready to tell you. And I wasn't ready then. I'm- I'm sorry if that hurt you. But it's what I needed to do, for me."

"I-" Tommy says. But then he pauses in an attempt to actually reflect on his words and what he's about to say. What does he want to say? What is he thinking?

He's- well he is a bit hurt. Because it feels like Tubbo didn't trust him. But he gets that it's not that simple. Tubbo had all his own shit going on. He was the one most affected by all of this.

Tommys is allowed to feel hurt because his feelings are valid, but it's not fair for him to invalidate Tubbo's in the process.

"Okay," he says again, "thanks for clarifying."

Tubbo gives him a smile.

"Thanks. I- I really am sorry you got hurt in the crossfire. I was confused and- and lost- and I really, really didn't want to risk losing you."

And fuck, now Tubbo's tearing up.

"You could never," Tommy quickly validates, "I- no. Never. We're- hey!- We're- hey!- We're- hey! Just killed a woman feeling good!- fuck, no I mean we're best friends, I couldn't- Tubbo how could I do anything without my sidekick."

"Sidekick? Tubbo asks, slightly mollified.

Tommy grins cheekily.

"Well yeah," he says, "You're the sidekick because I'm the main character. Obviously."

Tubbo snorts.

"Right," he says, "Obviously."

"We good?" he asks

"We're good," Tommy confirms.

And they are. Things are good.

They play Animal Crossing together after that, not really up to the high intensity of Smash Bros. Tommy may not be super willing to admit it, but that entire conversation had overwhelmed him a bit. Emotions are hard and Tubbo means so much to him and he's struggling to balance dealing with all of that.

Puffy says he gets overwhelmed so easily from strong emotions- especially positive ones- because he had repressed them for so long and lacked receiving positive affirmations and affection.

Tommy thinks that's bullshit, but yeah she's probably right.

But in Animal Crossing, in Animal Crossing Tommy doesn't have to talk to Tubbo. He can play his little caricature and do loops around Tubbo as he visits his island. They can plot and scheme how to take down Tom Nook and decorate the interiors of their housing.

Tommy loves that he and Tubbo can communicate so easily and seamlessly through video games. He could have never hoped for a better friend.

He never had hoped for a better friend. To be honest, he had given up hoping for a friend. Tommy looks to his side, watching Tubbo smile as they walk down a path together, talking about something or another about bells, and Tommy feels at peace.

It's a nice feeling.

Tommy's relaxing in his room later that day, just a little after Tubbo left, when there's a knock on his door.

"Yeah?" He calls out.

"Can I come in?" Wil comes back.

"Sure," he says.

His door pushes open and seconds later Wilbur trudges into his room, falling face first onto Tommy's bed. After a few seconds he groans and shifts, turning to his side instead.

"I want the man juice," he complains.

Tommy winces in sympathy. He doesn't really know what else to say.

He doesn't get being trans or intersex, obviously, and Wilbur doesn't come to him for comfort too often.

"Why can I have man juice and baby," Wil complains.

"Too powerful," Tommy goes with, "they had to- POGGERS, hey!- nerf you."

"Fuck that," Wil grumbles, "Me want boy juice. Me hungry for man."

"Glad to know I'm brothers to a cannibal," Techno says in that dry way of his as he shoves himself in the doorway.

Wilbur lights up at the sight of his brother.

"You can come in," Tommy permits and Techno wraps his way inside.

He joins them on the bed, sitting off at the corner. Wilbur makes grabby hands towards him, but Techno shakes his head minutely and Wilbur drops it with a slight pout.

"If you touch me I will punch you," Techno remarks.

"Will you punch my tits off for me?" Wilbur asks, sitting up, hair flopping all over the place.

Techno raises an eyebrow.

"If you want me to punch you in the tits, I can and will punch you in the tits."

"Uhhhh," Wil hesitates, "On second thought maybe not."

Fair enough. Tommy can understand that decision. Especially because Techno doesn't seem like the kind of guy who would hold his punches. Actually- Tommy knows Techno isn't the kind of guy to hold his punches. He's seen Techno beat the shit out of a punching bag all of once and Jesus. Techno does know the thing can't fight back, right?

Wilbur groans louder.

"Y'know, I've never wanted top surgery before. Hated my body for a while, but after T and therapy, I genuinely really came to love it, y'know? Loved being intersex and transmasc, having an intersex body. Felt right. But this- this I hate."

"You didn't expect that?" Tommy asks, "Like- being uncomfortable now?"

There's a time and a place about questions for Wil's experience being intersex, transmasc, and now pregnant. Tommy's at the point where he can now recognize that this is indeed the appropriate time.

Wilbur snorts.

"You say that like I was expecting to get pregnant."

"You weren't?" Tommy asks. His breath stumbles over his newest breathing tic.

"No," Wilbur laughs, "Fuck god no. Definitely not the plan. I didn't even know I could get pregnant."

"Oh- but, well I know you weren't sure, but I had thought, I thought it was something you were hoping for, trying for," Tommy notes.

Wilbur shakes his head. Huh. Well that's- That's thrown Tommy through a bit of a mental loop. He hadn't known that.

"Hate to ruin the bonding over accidental pregnancy," Techno says, "but I really am just here to get you two for dinner."

Now that Techno's home and Ranboo leaves the next day, they have one final family night.

On the Tuesday evening after dinner they all gather together in the living room for one final time spent together.

"So," Phil says, "what are we doing tonight?"

All five of them look at each other, saying nothing.

"I have an idea," Wil says abruptly.

"Alright," says Phil, "what is it?"

"It's a surprise," Wil says, "and we have to drive somewhere."

Techno frowns and squints his eyes.

"I think you'll like it," Wil promises, "all of you. But if you really don't want it to be a surprise, I'll tell you."

"Will it being a surprise make it better?" Ranboo asks.

Wil hesitates, and then nods. Tommy involuntarily copies the motion.

"Yeah," he says, "yeah it would."

They think for a moment.

"I'll grab the keys," Phil says, and so that's that. He disappears for a moment, taking his time to grab the keys from wherever they've ended up. In the meantime, Wil turns to all of them.

"You should grab sweatshirts," he says, "it'll be a bit chilly."

They share confused looks, but Wil urges them and so they scurry off to do as told.

Five minutes later they're piling into Phil's car, Wil at the wheel, headed to somewhere.

It's still early evening, so it's not completely dark, but the sun is about to dip completely below the horizon. Something about the near darkness makes Tommy feel safe, feel seen, even though he's pretty sure that people usually feel the exact opposite darkness like this.

Wil puts on some quiet music, humming absentmindedly, but besides that everyone stays quiet.

Wil didn't say they couldn't talk, couldn't make noise, they just... all chose not to for some reason.

Tommy chooses not to speak. He doesn't want to break the moment

Ultimately, he doesn't end up keeping the silence, tics deciding otherwise. But even when he does let out an odd gasp and a quiet 'mate' at one point, the atmosphere remains the same.

It's like... Tommy would describe it as a fog. A warm fog that wraps them up and lays across them. He thinks warm fog maybe describes what steam is supposed to be... but this isn't that. It's something else completely.

Eventually, they park, just as the last of the evening light fades from the horizon. Tommy instantly knows where they are.

"The beach?" he asks.

Wil nods, and says nothing more. One by one they exit the car.

Wil has them stand in the parking lot, the only car there. The pavement is dark beneath them, and when Tommy takes a few steps he can hear the slight crunch of the sand that's made its way into the cracks.

Wil leads them forward, out of the parking lot and down a trail. Phil takes up the back, watching over each of them.

They walk for maybe two minutes, eventually coming to a flat rock, just above the main beach. It's a large rock, perfect for sitting even with their large group. It's the right height that Tommy thinks he can dangle his feet off and probably just touch the sand below with his toes.

"Come on," Wil says, stepping forward into the rock. He settles on the far side, and then takes his shoes off, before letting his legs hang over the side. The moon lights him up, showing his lanky figure and the curve of his belly.

For a moment, all of them stand there still, unmoving.

Ranboo takes the first step forward.

He steps into the surface, going over to Wil's side and plopping down next to him.

He also elects to take his shoes off, putting them behind them, before closing his eyes and taking a deep breath in.

Tommy can hear the faint crashing of the evening waves mixed in with his breath.

Techno and Tommy move at the same side, adding a third and fourth figure to the rock. Just like Wil and Ranboo, they both take their shoes off, though Techno keeps his socks on and his hands off the surface of the rock.

Only Phil stands.

Wil gives him a look, and Phil gives him a nod.

He settles in the back, the only one not on the edge. He's with them still, not apart, but he's an observer, a supporter. Tommy thinks it suits him.

They spend maybe ten minutes breathing in the faint salt air as the wind gently whips across their faces.

It's Techno who breaks the moment.

He pulls his feet up, strips off his socks, and then takes his shirt off as well. He sets his glasses to the side, jumps off the rock and races straight for the waves.

Tommy wants to shout at him, ask him what he's doing, but he can't.

Instead, they all watch him in silence.

Techno keeps running, until he's waist deep and most definitely freezing. And just like that he dives into the ocean.

The spell is broken.

"Techno!" Wil shouts in shock as Tommy lets out a loud whoop.

Tommy can hear Phil loudly sigh behind him.

"Well?" Techno shouts from the waves, "who's joining me?"

There's a beat of silence before Ranboo's the next to stand.

“Ranboo, no,” Phil says.

“Ranboo, yes,” Ranboo says, and then goes careening in the direction of the sea, not bothering with his shirt like Techno.

“You’ll get hives,” Phil calls after him.

“Worth it,” Ranboo calls back.

Tommy snorts and leaps to join him. Ranboo slows to let him catch up. Techno cheers from the waves, and the two of them dive into the water at the same time, joining their older brother.

The three of them look back at the two sole members left on the rock.

They turn to each other, talking for a few seconds, though Tommy can’t make it out from where he is.

“Do you think they’re going to join us?” Ranboo asks.

“Yes,” Techno says, absolutely sure.

He’s right. Moments later, Wil and Phil both stand, taking off socks before strolling over to join them. Unlike the first three of them, they don’t race for the waves, instead taking their time with deliberate steps and casual conversations.

Then, all five of them are in the ocean.

“Do you know why the oceans are called different things?” Ranboo asks.

“No,” Wilbur says, “why?”

Ranboo shrugs.

“I don’t know,” he says, “I’m genuinely asking. I found it odd, y’know? Because the ocean, well there’s just one of it. It’s all connected. So why’s it got different names?”

“Regional differences,” Techno offers. “Locals called it what they knew, and it evolved from there. Probably.”

Ranboo shrugs.

“I guess,” he says with a sigh.

“Is that wrong?” Techno asks.

“No,” Ranboo says, “No- it’s just. I don’t know. It makes me feel less connected?”

“To the ocean?” Tommy asks.

“No,” Ranboo says, “To the other oceans.”

"I thought you said there was just one ocean," Phil points out.

"But there's not, is there," Ranboo remarks, "they're different, separate."

The five of them float with that information for a bit.

"Maybe- hey! You alright mate?- Maybe they can be both," Tommy offers, voice quiet. All of them turn to look at them. Wilbur gives him a small nod of encouragement. It fills Tommy with something, so he takes a deep breath and continues.

"Maybe they can be both," he says, "separate- hey! Just killed, just killed a woman feeling good- and together. They don't have to be one or the other."

"Yeah? Think so?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy nods.

Ranboo nods in turn, then hesitates.

"I think- I think you're, my brothers? But not my brothers. And Phil- Phil you're the closest thing I've ever had to a dad. A father figure, but not my dad. Is that- does that work?"

Tommy falls silent. He's not sure how to exactly respond. He knows what he thinks but he also doesn't know what Ranboo needs and doesn't want to mess it up.

"Does it work for you?" Phil probes gently.

Ranboo considers, then gives a small nod.

"It does."

"Then it works for me."

Ranboo smiles.

Guess it's as simple as that.

Before long, they're shivering, teeth chattering as the cool night sky presses on them from above and the chilling water soaks them below.

"Maybe this wasn't the best idea," Techno says as goosebumps begin to cover them.

"Impulsivity, yay," Tommy says sarcastically. Techno chuckles.

"Yeah..." Ranboo says, "Maybe not. Definitely have hives now."

"Okay, okay, out," Phil says, "let's get out and get warm in the car. Ranboo I have your meds in my bag. And really, you should know better, that was a dumb choice-"

"Too late."

"Oh my gosh what am I going to do with you?" asks Phil, hypothetically and exasperated.

"Don't worry I'll be making Niki deal with my stupid decisions soon enough," Ranboo says cheekily.

Phil rolls his eyes and gently ruffles Ranboo's head. He has to reach quite a bit up to do so. Ranboo laughs and makes no attempt to move away.

The journey back to the car is quick, and the moment they arrive, Wil is throwing open the truck and dragging out towels.

"You knew?" Techno says at the sight of them.

Wil rolls his eyes.

"I've lived with your impulsivity long enough, I like to think I'm prepared," he remarks as he passes them out, keeping a green turtle towel for himself. Tommy receives the peach one with starfish. The family has had these towels since before he got here, but he's pretty sure his and Wil's came in a set.

They dry off slowly, though their attempts only go so well. Their clothes are thick and filled with water, the material extremely absorbent and soaking through the towels quickly. Techno and Ranboo especially seem to be suffering. Ranboo's hives can't really get better if the water stays on him, and Techno's never liked the texture of wet clothes. He tries to move as little as possible, even as he pulls at his collar and shuffles his feet with small keening noises of discomfort. Why he put his shirt back on while he was still damp, Tommy has no idea.

And that's when Wilbur also pulls out changes of clothes for them.

Techno's eyes go wide at the sight. Wilbur laughs at the action.

But before moving any further to take the clothes, Techno digs into his shorts pocket and pulls out a small shell, obviously from the beach. Tommy doesn't even know when he grabbed it.

He hands it over to Wil.

"Thanks," Techno says, and then snatches the clothes.

Equal exchange and all that.

They get dressed in their new clothes, still a bit damp and smelling like salt, but at least no longer soaking. This time, Phil takes the driver's seat.

"Milkshakes?" he suggests, and is instantly met with a chorus of agreement.

They stop at the shake stop by the beach. Luckily, they're still open. They have later times for the summer and have yet to switch over to the fall times quite yet.

They order their shakes, driving through the pick up to grab them when they're done. Tommy's yawning at this point, even though it's not that late.

Ranboo sits next to him, shifting gently at his side and reaching his fingers to scratch at the red hives that cover his body.

"Don't itch," Tommy scolds.

Ranboo sighs.

"But it's itchy," he complains.

Tommy snorts. He would have more empathy, but well, Ranboo had been warned.

"Want benadryl? It'll knock you out," Phil offers.

Ranboo looks up but shakes his head. He goes back to sipping his cherry smoothie. And okay, who the hell gets a cherry smoothie?

Like, if you're going to get a fruit, get strawberry. And if you still want a fruit, get a smoothie. Come on, cherry milkshake? What was Ranboo thinking.

"Cherry, seriously," Tommy mutters in his direction.

Ranboo gives him a lighthearted glare back.

"I always get cherry."

Tommy wonders what he means. He doesn't ever remember getting milkshakes with Ranboo before.

"When?"

"As a kid," Ranboo replies instantly, "Niki would always get peach and I would get cherry at this little place where- where-" Ranboo trails off, furrowing his brow as he tries to put a name to his place.

After a moment he sighs and shrugs.

"That's all I remember. Peach and cherry ice cream milkshakes."

"If you want fruit, get a- women, killed a women- get a smoothie," Tommy grumbles.

Ranboo laughs at him.

"You got strawberry," he points out.

"Doesn't count," Tommy dismisses, then moves back to his own dessert. He narrowly avoids stabbing himself in the eye with his straw when tics decide to have his head jerk at just the wrong moment.

With a packed car and frozen drinks, they drive down the dark road to what has become Tommy's home.

Ranboo does take the offer of a Benadryl not too much later, and Tommy can only hope that it kicks in after they get home because he doesn't want to be responsible for lugging Ranboo into the house when he falls asleep.

But they get home with everyone still awake, and without a word, they shuffle off to their respective rooms.

Tommy yawns loudly and hops in the shower. He refuses to smell like seawater. When he gets out, he pulls out his PJs. He takes his time, lazily drying off as he pulls on the soft, comforting clothes.

When he's done he goes back to the bathroom. He goes to open the door when it practically opens in his face.

"Woah," he says, blearily and only half aware as Wilbur exits the bathroom. He shuffles off to his own room, and Tommy ducks into the room to brush his teeth.

Wilbur rejoins him a moment later, and as Tommy's spitting the last of his toothpaste in the sink, Wilbur is opening up the medicine cabinet and grabbing some vitamin things out of.

He passes by the orange prescription bottle Tommy can never forget. Prozac.

Faintly Tommy wonders why he has, he's pretty sure Wil can't take them when he's pregnant. But maybe they're just left over.

Tommy sees them, in something in his heart clenches.

"I love you," he says abruptly.

Wilbur glances back over at him, lip curling into a smile, but when he catches sight of Tommy, he tilts his head and squints. He looks back to the cabinet, and his gaze also catches the orange pill bottle Tommy had locked his gaze on.

"I love you too," Wilbur says. He closes the medicine cabinet and then he's gone.

Tommy stands there for a moment, and then leaves himself for his own room. When he gets there he collapses into his bed, almost instantly falling asleep.

Phil's sort of shit at the whole moving thing it turns out.

Ranboo still doesn't have too much stuff but they're also bringing along the whole family because everyone's insisted they help Ranboo move in. Ranboo rolled his eyes, but consented.

And Phil can't get the freaking boxes and suitcase to fit in.

"Phil," Techno says, "you're useless at this, let me do it."

"I'm not that bad," Phil protests, but he steps away anyway. Techno snorts and shakes his head.

"You are," Techno says, "and this is practically my superpower. Autism sorting brain go brr."

Techno looks over at Ranboo who's carefully checking over each box carefully, organizing everything as it should.

"Right Ranboo?" Techno calls.

Ranboo looks up from his spot and nods enthusiastically.

"And Wil! Put that box down! You're pregnant!"

Eventually through much struggle the car is packed and the crew is ready to go. There's no point waiting, so off the go.

It's a two hour drive and it's killing Tommy.

Seriously, it's the worst distance. Ranboo's just far enough away for it to be inconvenient while still not terribly far.

Tommy passes the time by trying to commit the entire road to memory, in case he ever does get his license and takes the trip to visit Ranboo.

All too soon, they arrive and start unpacking all of the boxes.

And then they're done. Suddenly, there's no more boxes in the car and more than a few have been completely unpacked and there's no reason to stay any longer.

"So- hey, that's POGGERS, pog- I guess this is goodbye then?" Tommy says awkwardly. Everyone else has started moving toward the car, but here Tommy and Ranboo are still at the door.

"What?" Ranboo asks, twisting his lips and pulling his eyebrows together

"This is goodbye," Tommy repeats.

Ranboo shakes his head.

"No it isn't," he says simply.

Tommy turns his head.

"See you later," Ranboo then says.

Tommy stares at him.

"Say it back," Ranboo says.

"See you- hey- see you later," Tommy echoes.

Ranboo nods.

"There you go," he says, "Now it's not a goodbye."

Tommy stares, and then surges forward wrapping Ranboo in a tight, firm hug before quickly letting go and taking a step back.

"See you later," Tommy says again.

"See you later," Ranboo returns.

At the same time, Ranboo begins to shut his front door, and Tommy turns toward the car, walking over to where his family is waiting for him.

Not goodbye, but see you later.

Tommy takes one glimpse back, catches sight of Niki hugging Ranboo through the window. Ranboo looks over at just the right time and just for a minute Tommy and his eyes meet.

And then Niki says something and Ranboo's laughing and Phil's calling Tommy's name and-

"See you later," he whispers, and returns to the car.

Chapter End Notes

I did the final editing tweaks for this while on a train. I posted this in an airport. I moved today. I feel like that's fitting.

And here it is, the end of this story of this series. I'm really fond of this one, and I personally think it makes a good sequel. It isn't the same as compass, it balances it in my mind. That's what a good sequel should do.

Ranboo's story is different than Tommy's. Sometimes that's how things work.

Now, on to next story news. First, very interesting that y'all think the Phil story is a sequel. (Hint, it's not)

NEXT STORY THINGS

-Title: shout your lungs out at me

-centers around Phil, his experiences with his parents, and his experiences being a parent.

-im taking a two week break, then it'll be up

-anyone remember the one trigger Phil mentions for himself in compass? Yeah. That's important.

-its a non-linear story

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